

No. 17

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ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY



JACK LIGHTFOOT IN THE SADDLE

OR A JOCKEY FOR JUST ONE DAY



BY MAURICE STEVENS

"Go!" shouted Lightfoot, suddenly, and like a bullet from a pistol good old Wellington shot ahead of the whole bunch.

Publishers' Note. "Teach the American boy how to become an athlete, and lay the foundation for a Constitution greater than that of the United States."—Wise sayings from "Tip Top." There has never been a time when the boys of this great country took so keen an interest in all manly and health-giving sports as they do to-day. As proof of this witness the record-breaking throngs that attend college struggles on the gridiron, as well as athletic and baseball games, and other tests of endurance and skill. In a multitude of other channels this love for the "life strenuous" is making itself manifest, so that, as a nation, we are rapidly forging to the front as seekers of honest sport. Recognizing this "handwriting on the wall," we have concluded that the time has arrived to give this vast army of young enthusiasts a publication devoted exclusively to invigorating out-door life. We feel we are justified in anticipating a warm response from our sturdy American boys, who are sure to revel in the stirring phases of sport and adventure, through which our characters pass from week to week.

ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY

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No. 17.

NEW YORK, June 3, 1905.

Price Five Cents.

JACK LIGHTFOOT IN THE SADDLE;

OR,

A Jockey for Just One Day.

By MAURICE STEVENS.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

Jack Lightfoot, the best all-round athlete in Cranford or vicinity, a lad clear of eye, clean of speech, and, after he had conquered a few of his faults, possessed of a faculty for *doing things* while others were talking, that by degrees caused him to be looked upon as the natural leader in all the sports Young America delights in—a boy who in learning to conquer himself put the power into his hands to wrest victory from others.

Tom Lightfoot, Jack's cousin, and sometimes his rival; though their striving for the mastery was always of the friendly, generous kind. Tom was called the "Book-Worm" by his fellows, on account of his love for studying such secrets of nature as practical observers have discovered and published; so that he possessed a fund of general knowledge calculated to prove useful when his wandering spirit took him abroad into strange lands.

Ned Skeen, of impulsive, nervous temperament, one of those who followed the newcomer, Birkett, being dazzled by the dash of his manner, and the free way in which he flung money around.

Lafe Lampton, a big, hulking chap, with an ever present craving for something to eat. Lafe always had his appetite along, and proved a staunch friend of our hero through thick and thin.

Kate Strawn and **Nellie Connor**, some of the girls at Cranford.

Phil Kirtland, Jack's former rival, but who just at present was working on the ball team with Lightfoot.

Nat Kimball, an undersized fellow, whose hobby was the study of *ju-jitsu*, and who had a dread of germs.

Brodie Strawn and **Wilson Crane**, members of the Cranford baseball team.

Nathan Connor, owner of the horse Wellington.

Jim Hogan, a groom in the employ of Mr. Connor.

Feiner, the jockey who was to ride Wellington.

Slattery, owner of race horses, and a man who was not above turning a dishonest dollar.

Cassidy, his clever tool.

CHAPTER I.

FOR THE COUNTY FAIR.

"I guess we'll have to let Jack Lightfoot do the business. He'll look after it all right, Lafe, and I'll bet he succeeds in landing us. I've seldom known him to tackle a job and fail to hold it down. For outright luck Jack carries off the whole bakery," and there was a tinge of jealousy in the voice of Phil Kirtland as he admitted this truth.

Lafe Lampton grinned and shrugged his sturdy shoulders, then reached over a fence near by and plucked a big, yellow apple from a tree, the branch of which came almost to the sidewalk, and voraciously set his sharp, white teeth into it.

Lafe Lampton was nearly always hungry, directly after meals being about the only time he was not. After a good, big dinner Lafe lost his appetite a little. It invariably returned very soon, however, and

apples was Lafe's stronghold, as the saying is, in between meals.

"I can think better when I'm eating an apple, Phil," said he, as his huge bite of the juicy fruit broke away with a regular popgun snap.

"That so, Lafe?" laughed Phil.

"Benson doesn't care how many of them I pluck. He told me yesterday to eat my fill."

"I guess he doesn't know how many you can hold, Lafe. Your limit is about like that of a cider press."

"Mebbe 'tis," was the reply. "But Benson says it's a downright pleasure to see me mow down an apple. So 'tis to me to eat it."

And Lafe Lampton laughed loudly and munched away, then reached back over the fence for a second yellow harvest apple before Benson's orchard should be left behind.

Lafe's companion was Phil Kirtland, both of whom were friends of Jack Lightfoot, and they then were heading for the latter's home; or, rather, they were bound for the shed room there, where the boys so frequently met to plan their sports, chiefly under Jack's capable leadership.

Usually these fairs are held in the early fall, but this year the experiment was being tried of holding one in midsummer instead, and it promised to arouse considerable interest, though farmers are generally very busy at such a time.

All the best of the year is seen at the county fair: the grandest output of the soil; the choicest fruit of vine, and shrub, and tree; the bred fowl of the county farms, the fattest swine, the sleekest kine, the powerful truck horse and clean-cut racer; and, withal, the handiwork in every art of man, woman and child for miles around.

For nothing or nobody is excluded, and a great, grand thing is the county fair, with its contests, its rivalry, its diverse amusements, its exhilarating sports, its stimulating effects upon all for the twelve months to follow.

It was about a matter pertaining to his summer county fair, due to be held at the Cranford county seat a few days later, that Lafe Lampton and Phil Kirtland were talking as they sauntered toward Jack Lightfoot's home that October afternoon.

"Jack has gone up to the post office now," added Phil; "to see if there is any reply to our challenge."

"He might not get it to-day," said Lafe, who was inclined to see the dark side of things—except apples.

Then it was a case of seeing the inside—and tasting it.

"He ought to get it to-day," replied Phil. "He wrote two days ago, and the managers at the fair grounds are usually very prompt in replying to such offers."

"When does this midsummer fair come off?"

"Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of next week."

"What ball teams already are engaged?"

"The Milfords and Highlands play Tuesday morning," replied Kirtland. "Then the winning team contests Wednesday morning with the Northport college boys."

"And Jack has challenged the winner of that match, has he?"

"Exactly!" exclaimed Kirtland, warming up a little. "Don't you see the point, Lafe? We could have got the second-day game easy enough, but Jack hung off for the one of Thursday, the last day of the fair, and the best of the three."

"Is that so?"

"Sure! There's always the biggest crowd that day, and the most exciting and best horse races. Gee whittaker! I'd sooner go the last day than both of the others. Here's another point, too."

"What's that, Phil?"

"If we Cranford boys can get the last day's ball game and win it, we shall beat a team that already has beaten a winner, and it will be all the more to our credit."

"By granny, that's so," assented Lafe, digging into his second apple.

"That's why Jack Lightfoot hung off for the Thursday game—see?"

"Of course I see it now, Phil, and it was a great move on Jack's part."

"He is shrewd enough, Lafe, and I take some little credit for throwing out a hint, too."

"The ball games at the fair are pulled off in the morning, aren't they?"

"Yes, from ten to twelve."

"That would give us a bully good chance to see the afternoon running races, eh?"

"Sure thing, and all of the other sports," cried Kirtland. "That's the way Jack sized it up. All of the best jockey races are down for Thursday afternoon, and it will be great if we can take them in."

"We'll take them in if we're there," grinned Lafe.

"And we'll be there all right, I'm thinking," declared Kirtland, significantly. "I'd just like to have our Cranford boys get a crack at that Northport college bunch. I believe we could show them a thing or two on the diamond, for all they're a bit older than we are."

"Age doesn't always count," growled Lafe. "Jack's got an older head on his shoulders than many a man of six feet and forty years."

"Perhaps that's so," said Phil, a bit dubiously.

"With the team work we can put up, and with Jack in the points, Phil, I'll bet we can wipe the green mat with any club that plays at the county fair."

"That's just my opinion, Lafe, and I guess I'm some at catching, too."

"There come Tom Lightfoot and Wilson Crane," cried Kirtland, abruptly. "They must have scudded across lots. Let's make a break and get to the shed before them."

Lafe complied, though not with much enthusiasm.

He was a strong, hulky chap, and would rather do heavy work behind the bat or on the gridiron rush line than indulge in sprinting merely for fun.

He broke into a run, however, only to be quickly distanced by Kirtland, who was a lithe, swift-footed chap, and Lafe arrived puffing at the shed room soon after Tom Lightfoot, Jack's cousin, had got the door open and entered with Kirtland and Wilson Crane.

The room was a good-sized one, and well fitted up for the purposes intended.

On the walls were the trophies of many a hard-fought and well-won contest in the various fields of sport.

Balls and bats, masks and mitts, golf sticks and hockeys, and—ah! but it would take a page to enumerate the endless variety of sporting goods the place presented.

"Haven't you seen Jack since school closed?" puffed Lafe, addressing Tom Lightfoot, as he entered the room and flopped into a chair.

"Yes, we left him at the post office," said Tom. "The mail had just come in, but was not distributed. He said he would wait, while we came down and opened the room."

"Gosh! I hope he'll hear from the fair managers."

"He'll get an answer in this mail," declared Wilson Crane, confidently. "I feel it in my bones."

"You couldn't feel it in anything else very well, seeing's you're most all bones," laughed Lafe.

The laugh was joined in by all the others, and Wilson Crane, who was a tall, rangy chap, but as wiry as a steel spring, retorted good-naturedly:

"Well, I wouldn't want to be as fat as you are, Lafe. You know what animals run to flesh instead of brains, don't you?"

"Yes," grinned Lafe. "A hog!"

"Holy smoke! if that was said to me," cried Kirtland, much tickled.

There was, in fact, no barb of malice to these arrows shot at one another by the Cranford boys.

True blue to the backbone, and as loyal to one another as Romans of old, their jests and jokes were but the pepper and salt that made their lives the merrier, and added savor to the true friendship that bound them together.

Before Crane could frame up any witty remark with which to respond to Lafe Lampton's blunt avowal, however, there came from the near distance the sound of a long, shrill whistle, as keen and penetrating as that of a bo'sun's call.

"Eureka!" yelled Kirtland. "There's Jack's whistle!"

In an instant all four of the boys were bolting for the door, between the sides of which they became wedged in a terrific scrimmage for a moment, resulting in none of them getting out first, but all hands plunging forward in a body, with Lafe Lampton sprawling headlong over the greensward, and yells of laughter ringing from the others.

It was such episodes as this, with its harmless enthusiasm, that made their lives more worth the living.

"Whoop! hurrah!" shouted Tom, pointing up the street. "There comes Jack, and he's got the letter."

All hands gazed in the direction indicated.

A hundred yards away, running as if for dear life, Jack Lightfoot was approaching with his cap in one hand, and with the other waving above his head the letter he had just received from the managers of the county fair.

He was a tall, clean-cut athlete, and his gray-blue eyes were aglow with triumphant light when he dashed into the yard and joined his waiting friends.

"It's all right, boys," he cried, in ringing tones. "I have landed the fish, and the game is ours."

"For Thursday?" cried every hearer.

"Yes."

"Whoop! Hurrah!"

"Gee whillikins cow! what a day we'll have of it!"

"Listen," cried Jack; "and I'll read you the letter. It's very complimentary."

"It ought to be," roared Lafe. "Let her go."

With a gesture Jack Lightfoot checked the noisy enthusiasm of his companions, and then proceeded to read aloud the letter he had received from the managers of the county fair.

"MR. JACK LIGHTFOOT,

"Captain of the Cranford B. B. Club.

"MY DEAR SIR: I have received your letter of even date, inclosing your challenge to the winner of the Wednesday morning ball game at the county fair grounds. After careful consideration by the fair managers, and in view of the enviable record made by your club thus far during the present season, it has been deemed to our advantage to accept your challenge for an exhibition game. We have, therefore, booked the Cranford B. B. Club for the Thursday morning game. Game called at ten o'clock sharp.

"Yours truly,

"J. SAGGS, Secretary."

"There!" exclaimed Jack, as he concluded. "What's the matter with that?"

"And what's the matter with Saggs?" supplemented Lampton, throwing up his cap with a yell.

Then all hands joined in with a roaring refrain from one of the school songs:

"Saggs, Saggs, who the deuce is Saggs?

Why, he's the manager of the county fair!

And the Cranford ball nine will all be there!

Whoop her up!

Whoop her up!

Always on the square!

Hurrah for Saggs and the county fair!"

And then this boisterous outburst ended in a brief, utterly indescribable war dance, and thus the Cranford boys were booked for the county fair.

CHAPTER II.

ABOUT OLD WELLINGTON.

"It is a fine letter, there's no mistake about that," remarked Jack Lightfoot, while the boys were seated about the shed room a little later.

"So it is, Jack, yet no better than we deserve," replied his cousin.

"I should say not," chimed in Kirtland. "Our season's record this far is a good one, you know."

"It was a great stroke on your part, Jack, to land the last day's game for us," said Lafe Lampton, admiringly. "We'll have a great day of it, aside from the ball game."

"That we will, Lafe," nodded Jack, "and the crowd there will be tremendous."

"From all over the county, too," cried Kirtland. "Gee! but what an army of rubes will be there."

"There will be no end of fun and sports," grinned Crane, curling up his pointed nose with a grimace of great anticipation. "I can hardly wait for the day to come."

"Oh, there'll be fun enough of all kinds," said Tom Lightfoot. "The town breaks wide open during the three days of the regular county fair in the fall, and this midsummer spell will be the same. Everybody seems to cut loose, and there are no restrictions placed upon anything."

"And that's no dream," cried Kirtland. "Even the confidence men are given free rein those days. More than one poor hayseed who thinks he can beat the shell game will drive home with less than he brings."

"Or the sweat cloth," laughed Lafe.

"Those are features that ought to be forbidden," remarked Jack, disapprovingly. "I don't believe in giving sharpers a privilege to swindle the ignorant."

"Nor do I," said Crane, who nearly always sided with Jack.

"Oh, well, nobody need bite at their bait," laughed Kirtland, with a toss of his head. "The con. men don't have a string on people to make them play. The ones who nibble are just as eager to win without giving anything in return, and at the worst none of them lose much."

"That's true enough," admitted Crane.

"For all that," insisted Jack; "I think that honest sports, of a kind that harm no one, are much the best. For my part I look forward to seeing the running races most of all."

"Me, too, Jack," cried Tom Lightfoot.

"They are by far the most exciting, and it is not often we get a chance to see them."

"I should say not."

"There will be some good horseflesh on the track this year, too," added Jack, with a knowing head shake. "I have seen the list of entries that is advertised, and there are some crackajacks down for the Thursday wind up."

"Is that so, Jack?"

"Two of them are New York horses that have been running at Brighton. One is a four-year-old, named Bunco, and the other is called Starlight. The owners and jockeys are coming with them, it is said, and they are known to be out for the stake."

"What is the stake, Jack?"

"A thousand dollars for that race," replied Lightfoot. "It is the last one to be run and the managers have made a special feature of it. It is to be the biggest race ever held in these parts, so it is booked for the last attraction."

"That is so as to hold the crowd until the last gun is fired," remarked Kirtland.

"No doubt."

"How many entries are there, Jack?"

"Up to date there are twelve, so last night's paper stated."

"Is it to be a mile run?"

"Seven furlongs, Lafe," replied Jack. "That is one-eighth less than a mile."

The boys always turned to Jack Lightfoot for information of this kind.

Besides keeping thoroughly posted upon sporting events, Jack had a very retentive memory, and he could nearly always answer any question bearing upon such matters.

He believed that anything worth doing at all was worth doing well.

"Oh, well, I suppose one of those Brighton ringers will carry off the stuff," said Kirtland, a bit grimly. "The managers ought to have barred that push. It's mighty seldom that you find any of them on the square."

"I am not so sure of them carrying off the stuff, Phil," replied Jack Lightfoot, with some assurance. "The professionals will make a big showing, no doubt, but there are several good horses in these parts, and it may not prove so easy to pick the winner."

"That's right, too," nodded Lafe Lampton. "Gibson's three-year old, Nancy Lee, is a mighty promising little mare. Clean bred, too. If she shows her heels as well in a bunch as she does when running with a mate only, she'll leave some of the field behind her when she comes under the wire."

"That she will, Lafe," assented Jack.

"How about Tolman's gelding, Gimlet?"

"I hear that he is entered for the last race, but I don't think he has even a look in," replied Jack.

"Why so?"

"He's too narrow chested," declared Jack, whose judgment in this direction was away over the average. "He hasn't got it in him to stand the racket. If Nancy Lee doesn't get nervous in so much company, she will show up far better than Gimlet, take my word for that."

"Well, it will be a great race, that last one, whichever horse turns the trick," said Kirtland.

"It will be the biggest race ever seen in these parts, Phil."

"No doubt of it."

"As for our ball game," added Jack, "that comes in the morning, so we shall be able to take in all of the afternoon races. We must get in a little practice before then, and brush up our team work, for I'd sooner miss seeing every race than lose that ball game."

"So would any of us, Jack."

"Ah! here comes Brodie Strawn," cried Crane, peering out of the shed door. "He'll be glad to hear the good news."

A sturdy young fellow was coming up the street, and, catching sight of Crane at the door, he waved his hand and then vaulted the fence and joined the boys in the shed room.

He was the first baseman of the Cranford ball nine, and the batting slugger of the whole team.

It was through Brodie Strawn's good work with the stick that the boys had crawled out of many a narrow hole, while a ball sent within reach of his mitt when on the first bag was always as good as smothered.

"What's that!" he exclaimed, when the good news was told him. "Got that Thursday morning game, have you?"

"Nothing less, Brodie."

"Good for you, Jack, and I'm mighty glad of it. I'll lace out some daisy cutters that day, if I never did before."

"We must pull the game off without fail," said Jack, showing Strawn the letter he had received from the fair managers. "After such a complimentary note as this, we cannot afford to go up there and lose."

"Not by a long chalk," cried Strawn, after reading the letter. "We will win it all right, I'll bet my cap on that. Now I've got some news to tell you fellows."

The ears of all were pricked up at once, as the speaker quickly added:

"Who do you think has entered his horse for the big race at the fair?"

"Dunno!"

"Give it up!"

"Out with it, Brodie!"

"None less than Mr. Nathan Conner, Nellie Conner's uncle," cried Strawn.

Jack Lightfoot came down with a bound from the bench on which he was perched.

"What?" he exclaimed, excitedly. "Not old Wellington! Not the big bay!"

"Exactly."

"For the seven-furlong race?"

"That's just the size of it," nodded Brodie.

"By gracious, I'm glad to hear that!" cried Jack, with much enthusiasm. "One thing now is dead sure, boys, we shall know which horse to root for, every one of us."

There was a very good reason for Jack Lightfoot's enthusiasm over this latest news.

The Nellie Conner mentioned was a pretty Cranford girl, and a warm personal friend of Jack.

More than that, she once had saved his life, just before the Milford ball game, by preventing his being trampled upon by a pair of runaway horses, while Jack was lying insensible on the road.

This enthusiasm was very natural, then, when Jack heard that Nellie Conner's uncle was to have a horse entered in the biggest race of the fair.

Nathan Conner, by the way, was a well-to-do dairyman, and possessed several good horses, among them the one mentioned.

Old Wellington was a big, rangy bay of eight years, and was no stranger to the race track, although two seasons had passed since he had been required to show his mettle.

Nor was Jack Lightfoot a stranger to the horse, as far as that goes, for he frequently had ridden him in exercise for Mr. Conner, with whom he was very well acquainted.

Nothing would have suited the Cranford boys better, taking the bunch as a whole, than to see the big race won by a horse owned by Nellie Conner's uncle.

Hence their general satisfaction when told by Brodie Strawn that old Wellington was entered for the race.

"Yes, yes, we shall know which horse to root for, all right," said Lafe Lampton, with a series of vigorous nods. "But what chance has old Wellington of winning against such a field as he must meet?"

"No chance at all, I am sure," demurred Crane.

"Don't you fellows be too certain of that," cried Jack, with a curious bright light in his earnest eyes. "I've ridden old Wellington many and many a time, and there's mighty good stuff in him yet."

"Do you really think so?"

"I know so," declared Lightfoot, decidedly. "He is a strong, rangy old fellow, and though his wind might not hold for a very long pull or for many heats, he can do great work on a single dash of seven furlongs. Take my word for it, boys, old Wellington will make a good showing."

"That is my opinion, too," nodded Brodie Strawn.

"I'd give something for the privilege of riding him that race," added Jack, with a bright red spot showing in either cheek.

"Perhaps Mr. Conner would engage you," suggested Tom, who had an abiding faith in Jack's ability.

"Oh, Jack can't do that," protested Crane. "He would have to train some for it, and that would knock

us out of his help in the ball game. He can't do both jobs that day, that's out of the question."

"Oh, I wouldn't desert you in the ball game," Jack loyally declared. "I merely remarked that I would enjoy riding old Wellington in that race, for I know the horse from ears to fetlocks. Besides, it would be great sport, and I believe I could bring out all there is in him. Old Wellington knows me, too, and that goes for something."

As a matter of fact, Jack would have given a good deal to have had the big bay mount in the coming race, but the next words of Brodie Strawn seemed to settle that matter forever.

"It's all fixed, boys, who is to ride him," said he, with a glance from one to the other. "Mr. Conner has a professional jockey coming here from New York."

"A professional jockey!" exclaimed Jack. "Do you know who he is?"

"He's the famous Tony Felner," replied Brodie. "Mr. Conner has spared no expense to bring his horse in a winner, if possible."

"Oh, ho! that makes things look a little different," cried Kirtland, cheerfully. "There may be some chance for old Wellington to win, after all."

"Mr. Conner thinks so," nodded Strawn.

"Did he tell you about this?" inquired Jack, with unabated interest.

"Not he," replied Brodie. "But his niece, Nellie, told my sister, Kate, and she told me."

"Ah! I see," murmured Jack, thoughtfully.

Then he added after a moment:

"Well, boys, we'll go up there and do our level best to carry off that game. That done, whether we prove to be winners or losers, we'll all take in the big race and root our hardest for old Wellington to come first under the wire."

"That we will, Jack."

"I'd feel nearly as bad to see him lose the race as I would in case we dropped the ball game."

"Let's expect to win in both events, that's the best way," cried Kirtland, hopefully.

"So I do, Phil."

"What time does the train leave here?"

"We'll go up on the early one," said Jack. "That will give us a chance to look about a bit before our game is called."

"So 'twill," nodded Strawn. "We should arrive at the fair grounds by nine o'clock."

"And we are down for Thursday, remember that," added Jack. "Meantime we'll devote every hour that we can get to good, hard practice."

CHAPTER III.

MAKING READY.

As Lafe Lampton dryly put it, there was "plenty doing" for the Cranford boys during the next four or five days.

Few ball teams in that locality could put up a faster and cleaner game than the Cranford boys.

Each day, too, they watched the local papers for all news about the fair, and the excitement increased from the day on which it had opened.

The Milford nine won from the Highlands in the first game, that of Tuesday, by a score of four to three.

The game of Wednesday was to be between the Milfords and the Northport college boys. This promised to be a hard-fought one, and the Cranford team was booked to play the winner of it the following morning, the last day of the big fair.

Jack Lightfoot hoped it would come down to a game with the college team, with which the Cranford nine never had played, and though he had lots of confidence that they could win it, he, nevertheless, felt the least bit anxious over the outlook.

For that reason he had kept the boys in constant practice, and studied the reports of the first game most carefully.

While at practice Tuesday afternoon he had remarked that he wished some of his nine could see the game of Wednesday, yet circumstances were such that he could not go to the fair that day.

Bright and early, however, Phil Kirtland showed up at Jack's house and rang the bell.

Jack had seen him coming and hastened to join him on the front steps.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, seeing Kirtland in his best clothes. "What's up, Phil?"

Kirtland laughed gleefully.

"I heard what you said yesterday, Jack," he replied; "and this morning I got my father's permission to go to the fair to-day and size up that game. He's as anxious as any of us that we should win."

Kirtland's father was quite wealthy, by the way, and took considerable interest in sport of various kinds himself.

Jack's face flushed with satisfaction when he heard this news.

"Eureka!" he cried, shaking Kirtland by the hand. "That's capital, Phil."

"I knew you'd be glad to hear it."

"That I am."

"I'm going up on the early train, so as to have a look at the fair before the game is played," ex-

plained Kirtland. "Then I'll come back on the noon train, so as to be here for the afternoon practice."

"That's the stuff," cried Jack, approvingly. "And it speaks well for you, Phil, that you are willing to return to practice instead of remaining to see the fair."

"Oh, my heart is in our game, Jack, and don't you forget it," said Kirtland, warmly.

"I believe you, Phil," nodded Lightfoot. "Now about to-day's game. I'm very sure that the Northport college boys will win, barring a fluke of some kind."

"That's my opinion, too."

"As for the Milfords, in case they pull off the game, I am satisfied that we can trim them up very handily. But I'm not so sure about that college bunch. We've never played them, and that's why I wished one of us could see what sort of a game they put up."

"I'll see it, Jack, make no mistake about that."

"Now, what I want is this," explained Jack. "Probably none of them will know you, and you easily can get the measure of their nine. Notice every weak point in their make-up, Phil, and just how clever they are at team work."

"Trust me for that," nodded Kirtland.

"Find out, too, if the same pitcher is to be in the box to-morrow," added Jack. "If he is, make it a point to see just what kind of a ball he delivers, particularly when in a tight place."

"That I will."

"Notice, also, whether he can keep his head," continued Jack. "If we can get onto him at critical times, Phil, I'm sure that we can do them up."

Jack Lightfoot was, at such times, like a general planning a battle and seeking out the weak spots of the enemy.

It is in this way that great achievements are performed, and much of Jack's success was the result of such preliminary work and careful study of the possibilities a situation might present.

The Cranford nine was at practice when Phil Kirtland returned from the fair that afternoon and joined them on the ball field.

He no sooner had arrived than he was surrounded by the entire team, eager to hear his report of the morning game and the fair itself.

"It's great—great!" he declared, in reply to a volley of questions. "The fair is a corker and—whew! what a crowd there was! I never saw a bigger display."

"But the ball game!" exclaimed Jack, who never for a moment lost sight of the most important matter. "How did that come out?"

"Nine to one in favor of the Northports," cried Kirtland.

"Nine to one!" echoed Jack, with a quick flash of the eye. "That looks like hot work for us to-morrow. What kind of a game did the Milfords put up?"

"A good one," said Kirtland, warmly. "Only two errors and those not very costly. But the Northports are sluggers from wayback, and made the Milfords' twirler look like thirty cents."

"Are they fast in the field?" demanded Jack.

"Pretty warm," nodded Kirtland. "Their team work is not up to ours, but they pulled in every ball to-day that came within reach. If they play as good a game to-morrow we shall have our hands full."

"Is the same pitcher going in against us?"

"Yes. He's the best they have."

"What's his delivery?"

"Left-handed," said Kirtland. "With a wicked in-shoot and a fair drop. Their only weak spot is at second base. He's a bit slow, but very sure of his throw. The rest of them are a warm bunch."

"Well, boys, we have an hour left before dark," cried Lightfoot, cheerfully. "Every man to his position till then, and every one of you in bed to-night before nine o'clock."

As was customary, Jack's instructions were followed to the letter, that no after regrets should arise in case of losing the game.

On his way home that afternoon Jack met Mr. Nathan Conner on the street, and the latter stopped him.

"How's that game coming out, Jack?" he inquired, with interest.

"Well, sir, we expect to win," replied Jack; "but it's no walkover for us."

"I hope that you do, Jack, I'm sure," said the dairy-man, heartily.

"Thank you, sir," bowed Lightfoot. "And I wish the same for you. I hear that you have entered old Wellington for the big running race."

"That's what I've done, Jack."

"We all want to see him show to the front."

Though he still wished it had fallen to his lot to ride the fine old bay, Jack was too modest to express such a desire.

The event was of so much importance, too, that he felt that he could not blame Mr. Conner for taking every precaution possible.

That the latter had done so appeared in his reply.

"Well, I have spared no expense to bring the bay

in a winner," said he. "I have brought a jockey from New York, one of the very best in the business."

"Tony Felner?" inquired Jack.

"Yes, that is his name," said Mr. Conner. "He knows every trick of the race track, and I feel sure that he can bring out all there is in the horse."

"Is Mr. Felner already in town, sir?"

"He is now at the fair-ground stables. I sent old Wellington up there last Monday, and Felner and a groom from my stable have charge of him."

"Well, sir, I repeat, I hope he'll win," said Jack, as they were about parting.

"Much obliged, Jack," smiled Mr. Conner. "Shall you be at the fair to see the great race?"

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Conner," said Jack. "Our whole nine will remain to witness the race. As for me, I'd take a chance of life and limbs to bring old Wellington under the wire a winner."

"I really believe you would, Jack," cried Mr. Conner, heartily shaking Lightfoot by the hand. "Well, we will all hope for the best—and work our best for it, too."

"That's all any man could do, sir," smiled Jack, as he moved away.

Despite his interest in the coming ball game, he could not help thinking of old Wellington and the great race, while he continued on his way home.

He did not for a moment imagine, however, that his brief interview with Mr. Conner was to have any after results, nor that incidents of a most startling kind were destined to place him in the saddle and on old Wellington's back at the very last moment.

Yet coming events sometimes cast their shadows before, it is said; and all night long Jack Lightfoot dreamed, not of the ball game, but of race tracks and stables, of plunging horses and surging crowds, of jockeys in all the colors of the rainbow, and of a screaming, shrieking multitude of excitement-crazed spectators.

The eventful day dawned with a sky that was clear of clouds from horizon to horizon, and with a crisp coolness in the fresh morning air unusual to the season.

Jack was out of bed bright and early, first into his gymnasium just to limber up a bit, and then into a cold bath, followed by a brisk rub down.

"I feel fit this morning, mother, to do the greatest feat of my life," said he, at the breakfast table, and his mother smiled proudly and joined in his laugh.

Still neither dreamed that the feat was that day to be performed.

Most of the ball team met at the shed room, their

usual headquarters, at seven o'clock, and then proceeded in a body to the railway station.

The make-up of the nine was the same as during the earlier part of the season, and each carried his own suit and trappings.

"Gee whittaker!" exclaimed Lafe Lampton, as they came in sight of the station. "What a crowd!"

"Everybody is going up on the early train," laughed Jack. "It is the biggest day of the fair and all wish to make the most of it."

"You mean that they are going up to see us play," remarked Ned Skeen. "That's what's taking them to the fair in such numbers."

"And to see old Wellington win the big race," supplemented Jack Lightfoot.

"Well, it looks to me," added Lafe; "as if there wouldn't be a soul left in Cranford."

"Never mind," cried Kirtland. "The good old town will be here when we return. And we must come back victors, boys, mind that!"

A ringing cheer from the great crowd greeted the ball nine as they approached, and the boys doffed their caps.

Then Tom Lightfoot, who was treasurer and looked after the business end of the team, hustled away to procure the necessary tickets.

"Get cut rates, Tom," said Lafe to him. "Look out for that."

Tom glanced back and laughed.

Meantime, Jack Lightfoot caught sight of two girls, amid a lively group at one end of the platform, and he went to speak to them.

One was Kate Strawn, Brodie's sister, and the other was Nellie Conner.

Both were as bright and rosy as girls could well be, and they greeted Jack cordially.

"So you are going up to see us play, are you?" he asked.

"Yes, Jack, and to see dear old Wellington race," replied Nellie. "Oh, I hope you both will win."

Both of us will do our level best, you may be sure of that," declared Jack, smiling at her enthusiasm.

"I'll tell you one thing, Jack," she whispered, drawing a bit nearer.

"Well?"

"I believe that Wellington would win if you were to ride him," she explained, with confidential fervor. "I know that he is awfully fond of you, Jack, and would go like the wind if you were in the saddle and gave him the word."

Jack laughed and playfully pinched the back of her pretty hand.

"I hope, Nellie," said he, "that Wellington is not the only one of the family who is fond of me."

This served only to make the girl's cheeks the rosier and her eyes the brighter; but before she could find words with which to reply, the shrill toot of the approaching train was heard, and Jack hastened away to rejoin the ball team.

In another minute the great crowd of people was surging aboard the train, and in sixty seconds more the station was being left behind, and all were bound for the mid-summer county fair.

CHAPTER IV.

BEFORE THE GAME.

It was not quite nine o'clock when the vast fair grounds were reached by the Cranford boys.

Having disposed of their luggage in the quarters allotted them, they had nearly an hour in which to look about the fair before the ball game should be called.

"We'd better stick together," said Jack, as they set forth from their dressing room. "Then there will be no slip up when the time comes."

"That's a good idea," said Kirtland, as they reached the main grounds.

In a huge building near the entrance of the fair was the early fruit and produce display, also no end of art and fancywork, in none of which the boys then felt any interest.

Lafe alone remarked, as he caught a glimpse through one of the windows they were passing:

"I'd like to get my hooks on one of those big, red, harvest apples on the table in there. Gee! but they are rippers."

Beyond the building mentioned was a long line of tents and booths, in which food and meals could be procured, with no end of soft drinks, ice cream and the like.

Opposite these were numerous devices for amusement, and at the same time for separating the participants from their money.

One of the schemes was for pitching a wooden ring over the top of one of a lot of cheap canes, all standing on end.

"You land the ring and you get the cane! Only a dime a try! Every man and boy ought to carry a cane! Only a dime a try!"

Such were the continuous shouts of the manager of the scheme.

He was by no means alone, however, for his loud voice was only mingled with a score of other vociferous voices, each striving to be the loudest and to attract the most attention, and all addressing the gaping crowd without ceasing.

Near by was a long shooting gallery, three shots for a nickel.

Beyond this was a merry-go-round, with twenty pairs of prancing, wooden steeds, each with a juvenile mount in frock or knickerbockers, and all whirling dizzily around to the music of an ear-racking band of three brass pieces.

Beyond this attraction was a magician in a big, gilded wagon, doing tricks a part of the time and selling patent medicine between the tricks—that is, when he was lucky enough to find a buyer among the gazing throng.

One of the first things to attract the Cranford boys, who were sauntering about together, was a scheme of two darkies for disposing of cigars.

One of the coons stood at the rope inclosing the space allotted them, and for five cents sold anyone the privilege of throwing three baseballs at the head of the other darky, which was thrust through a hole in a big, upright square of canvas some twenty feet away.

All that one could see of darky number two was his frizzly head, with its white eyeballs and grinning teeth.

"Oh, by gracious, let's have a crack at that," cried Lafe Lampton, the moment he caught sight of the scheme.

"You might hurt the poor fellow if you were to hit him," remarked Jack, not much inclined to such sport.

"Hurt him!" cried Lafe, derisively. "You can't hurt a darky by hitting him on the head. You might as well crack one of those balls against a brick wall. Besides, he'll dodge them and it's ten to one you can't hit him if you try."

"Heah you are, gents!" shouted darky number one, holding up three of the balls. "Walk right up, gents! Have a shot at Pompey's head. Three balls for a dime. One cigar if you hit him once. Two cigars if you hit him twice. Five cigars if you hit him with all three balls. Five for a dime, gents, if you hit with every ball. Walk right up and have a shot at Pompey's head."

Pompey's vast grin seemed to invite the fusillade quite as much as the other's vociferous cries, and Lafe declared roundly:

"I'll take one cigar away from that bunch, or I'll know the reason why."

This brought all of the boys to a stop outside the line, and Lafe paid his ten cents and took the balls.

"What do you want of the cigars?" inquired Jack. "You don't smoke."

"I'll give them away," laughed Lafe. "I don't want the cigars, as far as that goes. All I want is a crack at that fellow's black head. He looks sassy."

"Come on, sah," shouted Pompey, who had overheard all that was said. "Hit it if you can, sah. Don't be afeard o' hurtin' me, sah. Dis yeah block o' mine am like a chuck o' wood. Yo' can't hurt it, sah."

"Look out, then," shouted Lafe. "Here goes."

He drew back a step with the last, then sent a straight liner at the darky's head.

Pompey's head went to one side like a flash.

Biff came the ball against the canvas, then dropped to the ground.

"Yah, yah!" yelled the darky, at the top of his lungs. "What'd I tell yo'?"

"Look out for number two," roared Lafe.

Then he let it go.

Biff!

Again he had missed Pompey's head by an inch or two, and the mark yelled with delight.

"Yo'll have to shoot straight'n that to tote off any o' our Henry Clays," he cried, and the crowd that had gathered near laughed loudly.

This made Lafe feel a little sheepish, and he laid himself out on the last of his three balls.

"Give me a little more room," he whispered to Kirtland, who was nearest to him. "If I don't plunk that black chestnut burr this time I'll go without my dinner."

"Yes, you will!" muttered Phil, derisively.

Lafe drew back and gave his arm a clean sweep.

The ball left his hand like a bullet from a gun.

It was going straight to the mark.

Pompey's gleaming eyes were upon it, however, and he ducked just at the right moment.

Bang the ball came against the canvas just above his head, and the crowd roared again.

"You lose, sah," said the darky who sold the balls. "Try it again, sah. Better luck next time."

"Here, get out of the way, Lafe," cried Ned Skeen, who was a nervous, excitable chap and could not remain idle at such a time. "You're no good. Let me have a crack at him."

Lafe felt a little chagrin at his bad luck, and not hoping for much better if he tried again, he thought it a good scheme to shift the laugh upon Ned, in case he also failed.

So he drew to one side, while Ned paid over his dime for the fun of having the three shots.

Pompey got ready again and grinned broader than ever.

"Let 'em come, sah," he shouted. "Yo' hit de target, sah, and yo' gits de goods. Bing! now yo're at it!"

The first ball had left Ned's hand like a flash of light.

It went a foot wide of the mark, however, and a yell of derision greeted the bad shot.

"Say!" yelled Pompey. "I won't move when yo' fire. Yo' can't hit me if I keep still."

This rattled Ned a little and his second shot was not much better.

The third, however, just grazed the darky's ear, and missed only enough so that he failed to get the cigar.

"Here, Jack, you have a crack at him," cried Wilson Crane, seizing Jack by the arm and drawing him forward. "Some of us must hit that fellow, or we shall be put down for a lot of no-goods."

"Really, Crane, I don't care to."

"Oh, come, try one or two of your in-shoots on him," pleaded Crane. "Just to see if you can reach him."

"Come on, Jack," added Kirtland.

Thus persuaded, Jack finally consented to make the attempt.

Jack Lightfoot never half did anything, moreover, and when he took the three balls he was resolved to hit the mark if possible.

Yet he said to the other darky, quietly:

"You are sure I shall not hurt him, mister?"

"Naw!" was the reply, with a grimace. "Yer can't hurt him. As fur as that goes, yer can't hit him."

"Can't I?" said Jack, carelessly.

Then he drew back and poised one of the balls in his reliable old right.

A momentary hush fell upon the gazing crowd.

Pompey's eyes took on a sharper gleam.

Jack said to himself that he was merely sending a ball for the plate, with three balls and two strikes already called on him.

He delivered a long outcurve.

The darky grinned when he saw it coming, and thought it was going a yard out of the way.

It was coming fast, however, and suddenly it swerved and shot at him like a rattlesnake out of a clump of grass.

Plunk!

It caught Pompey squarely in the middle of the forehead, and bounced nearly back to Jack's feet.

The yell that went up could have been heard a mile away.

Even the darky at the rope was compelled to laugh.

"Good shot, sah," he cried, with a wink at his companion. "You get the Henry Clay, sah."

"Here, let me hold it for you, Jack," cried Kirtland, taking the cigar. "Give him another in the same spot, just for luck."

"Let her come, sah," shouted Pompey, who was not in the least hurt. "Yo' can't do it ag'in."

Jack had become a little warmed up to the sport by this time, and was beginning to use his head.

He shifted his delivery on the second ball, and sent in a swift in-shoot, just the opposite of the first.

Pompey figured on its coming the same as the other and dodged quickly to one side, with a result that he dodged right at the ball.

Crack!

This time it hit him squarely on top of his head and flew clean over the canvas.

"Foul ball!" yelled Lafe Lampton, in a frenzy of glee. "Gee whillikins! that was a corker, Jack."

The crowd was applauding noisily and shouting as if for dear life.

"Heah's another Henry Clay, sah," cried the darky, again producing the cigar box. "Hit him the third time and you get five more. Don't be afeared, sah. You can't hurt him."

Pompey was still grinning broadly, evidently inviting the last shot, and the watching crowd was on nettles.

Jack felt as cool as a cucumber, however.

He steadied himself for a moment, rising a little on his toes, then sent in a straight drop ball, as swift as a flash of lightning.

It reached its mark before Pompey fairly realized that it had started.

Bing!

It caromed from the darky's head, shot over those of the crowd, and then went flying among the horses of the merry-go-round, never to return.

"That's enough, boys," said Jack, drawing back from the rope.

His voice was fairly drowned by the cheers of the crowd, and even Pompey himself had come out from behind the canvas and was applauding, at the same time scratching his kinky head.

"Not hurt, are you?" called Jack, laughing.

"Not a bit, sah," cried the darky. "Yo're all right, sah, yo' are. That nebber was done to me before."

"There's always a first time," cried Jack, pocketing the cigars. "Come on, boys. We'll see what we can find elsewhere."

"Jerusha!" exclaimed Lafe, as the boys made their way through the crowd and sought other attractions. "If you send them in like that this morning, Jack, we'll make the Northport boys look like butter on a hot day."

"It was great, Jack, for a fact," added Crane.

"Oh, it merely served to limber up my arm," laughed Jack. "That darky's head must be as hard as a pine knot, for I sent every ball for all I had in me."

"What are you going to do with the cigars?"

"Give them away to a party I have in mind."

"Hello! what's going on over yonder?" cried Lafe, abruptly.

The place indicated by Lafe was a secluded corner near the high fence inclosing the grounds, where a group of men had collected well out of general observation.

Jack at once suspected that some kind of a gambling scheme was going on, as such things are known to be winked at sometimes at many of the county fairs, just to draw the larger crowds and so swell the gate receipts.

"It looks to me as if they were gambling," said Jack, as the boys halted and gazed toward the group.

"Let's go and have a look at them," suggested Kirtland.

"We don't want any part in that kind of business," replied Jack, with some disapproval.

"No, but we want to see all there is going on," growled Kirtland, who was a stickler for having his own way. "We are not obliged to play, just because we look at them."

"Come on, Jack," said Lafe. "We'll not stay there long."

So Jack Lightfoot went with the others.

Back of a small table placed quite near the high fence a flashily dressed man was standing, cleverly manipulating three ordinary playing cards, two aces and one queen.

"He's a three-card monte man," whispered Jack, as they drew nearer.

Lightfoot was right, and the boys lingered to watch the gambler's game.

First he showed the three cards to all, so that the face of them could be plainly seen, and then with a

quick, curious throw he cast them face down on the table, a few inches apart.

Then, with the characteristic talk of such fellows, he offered to bet any of the spectators that they could not pick out the queen from the three cards—or the "old woman," as he called her.

Most of the spectators were countrymen, far too easily duped by such a scheme.

The gambler had a confederate, moreover, who pretended to be a stranger, yet who nearly always picked the right card and won the bet, and his apparent success only served to lure the countrymen on.

"Come on, now," the gambler was crying, as the boys approached. "It's easy money. All you've got to do is cover my bet and pick the old woman. It's like finding money in the road. A dollar with any gent that he can't pick her. Only a dollar, gents. Not enough to make or break any man. Look sharp, now, and I'll throw them again. See, two aces and a queen. One, two, three, and away they go. Now, gents, a dollar with any man that he can't pick the old woman."

A rube with pointed chin whiskers and a straw in his mouth planked down a dollar and took the bet.

"Good for you, Cy," cried the gambler. "I'm glad there's one sport here. Let her go, now. Pick the old woman and you win the money."

The countryman ambled closer to the table, and with eyes aglow made a dive at one of the cards.

He picked up one of the aces.

"Waal, I'll be eternally gol-darned!" he cried, with a loud nasal twang. "I could jest a swored thet air was the keerd."

"You lose, Cy," said the gambler, coolly pocketing the money. "Try it again though, Cy. Mebbe you'll hit it right the next time. Look sharp, and there they go again. A dollar to any who can pick the old woman."

Cy, so called, made a second attempt and lost again.

"Gosh all hemlock! can't I see straight?" he snarled, while the crowd all laughed and the bunco man pulled in the dollars.

Jack Lightfoot had watched him make the several throws, and Jack's eyes were sharper than those of any cat.

On the very second throw he saw how the trick was done, yet he waited for the third and fourth just to be absolutely sure.

When the gambler picked up the cards, moreover, Jack caught sight of the face of them and knew he was right.

He had no wish to gamble, however, but he had noticed a countryman at one side whose dejected countenance indicated that he had lost some money.

Jack edged over beside him presently, and asked, softly:

"Have you been playing against that game?"

The countryman looked up at him and nodded.

"I've lost five hull dollars, half er what I hed with me," he whispered. "Jimminy beeswax! I'll git the blamdest jawin' a man ever got when my wife gits wind of it."

Jack laughed softly and said:

"Will you promise never to gamble again, in case I win it back for you?"

The countryman jumped at the offer like a fish at a fly.

"You bet your woolen socks I will," he whispered, eagerly. "Kin ye do it?"

"Easily," nodded Jack. "I know how the trick is done."

"Tell me, by gosh!"

"No, but I'll tell you what to do," said Jack. "You offer to bet him your other five dollars after his next throw. Meantime, I will step over yonder, just to the right of him."

"And what then?"

"After the cards are down on the table," whispered Jack, "you glance at me and I'll tell you the one to pick. If it's the one to the right of you, I'll turp my head that way, or the opposite if it's the one to the left. In case the queen is in the middle, I will bow my head straight forward. Do you understand?"

"Say, what is this?" queried the countryman, suspiciously. "A game to git my other fiver?"

"If you lose," replied Jack, softly, "I'll make you a present of two fives."

"Bully boy with a glass eye!" muttered the other. "Thet's goobd enough fur me."

"I'll go over yonder, then, and you get ready to bet," said Jack. "You are sure you understand my signals?"

"Sartin!"

"Don't be afraid, then. I'll not fail you."

Then Jack drew back to his former position.

The gambler was still talking glibly and throwing the cards.

Presently Jack nodded to the countryman, and the latter hopped nearer and cried:

"Say, mister, I'll bet yer five I can pick the old hen out o' that bunch."

The gambler took the bet with a loud laugh, and planked down a five.

Jack gave his head a toss to the right, and the countryman made a dive for the card indicated.

He picked up the—queen!

Jack Lightfoot had hit the nail on the head.

The gambler drew back with a look of amazement, then glanced sharply around.

But he never knew what had queered his infamous swindle, for Jack looked as innocent as a baby.

The funny part of the episode, however, was the move made by the countryman.

He made a dive for both five-dollar bills, uttered a yell of delight, and then ran off across the fair grounds as if Satan was after him—or his wife.

Jack Lightfoot laughed and glanced at his watch.

"It's nearing ten, boys," he cried. "We must get up to our dressing room. The game will be called in a quarter hour."

CHAPTER V.

AT THE TRACK STABLES.

It was precisely ten o'clock when the ball game was called and the Cranford nine went into the field against the Northport college boys.

Jack Lightfoot was in the box, with Lafe Lampton behind the bat, and the nine as a whole never presented a better appearance.

The field was laid out in the vast ring of the mile race track, and was as level as a barn floor.

This location of the diamond enabled the occupants of the track grand stand to see both the ball game and the bicycle races in progress at the same time, and a crowd of nearly five thousand people were gathered to witness both events.

The interest of nearly all, however, was centered upon the ball game, as was evident from the thunders of applause, a roar like that of Niagara, that greeted every good play on the part of either team.

It would be interesting to describe the various exciting features of the game, and note the brilliant plays made by both sides, but the events that followed were so much more important that they must be got at without delay.

It was half-past eleven when the game ended, with a score of two to one in favor of the Cranfords, and the applause in the grand stand and all around the vast oval was like the roar and roll of thunder.

Flushed with pride and excitement Jack Lightfoot led his companions back to their dressing room, where

they removed their dust-soiled suits and got into their ordinary clothes.

The glow of well-earned victory was in the cheeks of all, and the day was made the brighter because of their good fortune.

"Now if old Wellington can win the big race," remarked Jack, while he was dressing; "that is all I will ask for one day."

"Somehow I kind of feel that he is going to win," declared Wilson Crane, with his usual confidence. "I feel it in my bones."

"That's a good sign," cried Lafe, laughing. "Whenever Crane feels it in his bones, things generally turn that way."

"I hope it may be true," said Jack, smiling.

"What time do the afternoon races begin?" inquired Kirtland.

"One o'clock sharp."

"And the big race?"

"That will come off about five."

"There's plenty of time to look about, then, before the fun starts?" said Ned Skeen, hurrying into his coat. "I want to see the show of cattle. I've not been half over the grounds."

"When and where do we eat?" asked Lafe Lampton, who always had his appetite along with him. "I'm as empty as a drum. I'd give two days of my life for a quart of apples."

Jack Lightfoot laughed, as did all the others.

"Mr. Saggs has arranged for our dinner," said he.

"Bully for Saggs!" cried Lafe, with a look of relief.

"We are to have it at half-past twelve in the big pavilion," added Jack. "There will be a special table reserved for us."

"Good enough! I won't do a thing to what's on it," grinned Lampton.

"There's no longer any need of our sticking together, is there, Jack?" asked Brodie Strawn, who was about ready to light out.

"Not at all," said Jack. "Get all the fun you can, boys, and we'll meet in half an hour at the dinner table. As for me, I am going down to the track stables. I want to see in what kind of shape old Wellington is."

"Huh! there won't be any fun at the stables," ejaculated Lafe. "I can see stables and horses every day in the week."

"Each to his own taste," replied Lightfoot, cheerfully. "I'll see you later, boys. I'm bound off to have a look at the big bay."

None of the others seemed inclined to accompany

him down to the track stables, so Jack started off alone.

With the ball game now well off his mind, Jack's entire interest centered in the coming race.

He was so anxious for Mr. Conner's horse to win that he could think of nothing else, and he headed straight for the stables to see what he could learn about it.

The stables, which covered nearly half an acre, were located in a remote part of the vast grounds, below the great oval track.

The crowd of people was not so great in that locality, as none of the other attractions were in that part of the grounds.

The people there consisted chiefly of horsemen, jockeys, and a little army of hostlers and grooms, who worked in the various stables and looked after the racers.

Besides these, however, there were a number of men who made up books on the various races, gamblers, in fact, and who fixed the betting odds on the different horses.

Along with all of these, moreover, there were numerous sporting men from all of the neighboring cities and towns, who had come there to bet on the races, and who wished to look over the various horses and get an idea of their speed and quality before they should appear on the race track.

It was into the midst of this lot of men that Jack Lightfoot made his way, after crossing the track oval; yet none of them recognized him as one of the crack ball players, and so he attracted but little attention.

After making a few inquiries Jack learned from one of the hostlers in which of the numerous separate stables Mr. Conner's horse was quartered, and thither he hastened.

The quarters allotted to Mr. Conner were at the furthest end of the long row of stables, which were little more than separate sheds, in fact, with doors that could be locked, and with a comfortable stall in each.

As he approached the open door Jack caught sight of Mr. Conner's regular groom at Cranford, with whom he was well acquainted.

"Ah! hello, Jim," he cried, halting at the door. "May I come in?"

Jim Hogan, which was the groom's full name, uttered a cry of pleasure.

"Bedad, and is that you, Jack?" he replied, hastening to shake hands with the Cranford boy.

"Nobody else, Jim."

"Can you come in, is it?" cried Hogan. "Faith, ye're as welcome as the sunlight, so ye are."

"Thanks, Jim."

"And it's your team that was after winning the ball game, I'm told. By these five fingers across, Jack, I might a knowed your team would win it. The Cranford boys can't be downed by any in these parts."

Jack laughed a little at Hogan's enthusiasm, then pulled out the cigars he had won that morning.

"Here are a few cigars for you, Jim," said he.

"For me, Jack?"

"Sure thing! I got them pitching ball at a coon's head," laughed Jack, as the ludicrous incident recurred to him. "I thought you would enjoy them, Jim, and I never smoke, you know."

"Begorra, Jack, ye're all right," cried Hogan, cheerfully accepting the several cigars. "I'll kape them till after the race, I will. How was you after knowing I was down here?"

"I met Mr. Conner on the street last evening, Jim, and he told me you were to be here to look after old Wellington."

"So that was the way of it, eh?"

"Now tell me, Jim, how is old Wellington doing?"

And Jack turned and approached the stall in which the big bay was quartered.

Old Wellington had already heard Jack's voice, and now he swung round in the broad stall, whinnying softly and rubbing his velvety nose over Jack's shoulder, when the latter came to fondly pat his outstretched neck.

"Sure, he knows ye all right," cried Hogan, heartily. "Bedad, and he's as glad as I am to see ye. There niver was the like of you, Jack, in all the world. No, niver!"

"The horse appears to be in pretty good form, Jim," said Jack, carefully looking the animal over.

"Good form, is it?" cried Hogan, with an amusing laugh. "Faith he niver was better. How else would he be, Jack, wid me having the care of him."

"That's right, too, Jim," laughed Jack. "What are the chances of his winning the big race, do you think?"

"Chances?"

Hogan spoke the last in a careful whisper only, and glanced sharply over his shoulder toward the open door.

This made it plain enough to Jack that not very much was being given out about old Wellington's chance, and Jack's hopes rose several degrees.

"Whist!" whispered Hogan, taking him by the arm

and drawing him still further from the door. "I'll say it to you, laddie, but don't give it away. Don't let it go any further."

"Not for the world, Hogan," said Jack, with ever-increasing interest.

"If ye've got any money to bet, Jack, put it all on old Wellington, ivery copper of it."

"But I never bet, Jim, on anything."

"Wull, I'm only saying if ye do."

"Then you think old Wellington will win, do you?"

"It's dead sure of it I am," said Hogan, with subdued earnestness. "So is Felner, the jockey, who's as plazed wid his mount as if the stake was right here in our pockets this very minute."

"By gracious, Jim, I'm glad to hear this," said Jack, most heartily.

"But mind ye, Jack, wan thing," added Hogan, impressively.

"What's that?"

"Say niver a word to Felner that I was after telling ye this. I know I can trust ye, lad, or I'd not a done so. The jockey might not like it—sure I know he'd not."

"I won't breathe it, Hogan, on my word," protested Jack, warmly.

"Faith, and I know ye'll not. Then ag'in, lad, it's like this. Felner's a funny little dog, so he is, and wants no one to know what the big bay can do. That'll make the odds agin' him the better, d'ye see?"

"Certainly," nodded Jack. "The bookies will think he hasn't a look in to win."

"Ay, that's just it," whispered Hogan. "Then, here's another thing, d'ye see? The other jockeys won't be so watchful-like of Felner when it comes to the race, and he can run the horse to the better advantage."

"That's a clever scheme, too," nodded Jack, quick to appreciate the point.

And he remembered it a little later, too.

"Oh, it's a wise guy is little Felner," said Hogan, with a vigorous shake of his head. "Divil a trick of the race track that he's not on to, Jack. Faith, I like him the better the more I see of the little rascal."

"He's a small man, then?" inquired Jack, with interest.

"Small, is it?" laughed Hogan. "Bedad, he'd not weigh a hundred pounds. Not much less than yourself, Jack."

"Is that so, Jim?" rejoined Lightfoot.

"Sure, that's so; the bay won't have too much

weight to carry," explained Hogan. "He'd not go as fast with a big man on his back."

"Of course not, Jim. I should have thought of that."

"Then ag'in—whist! aizy, lad!"

There was a sound of approaching footsteps outside the stable door, and Hogan held up a warning finger.

Jack Lightfoot now began to see that caution, secrecy and cunning figured strongly in the business of the race track, more so than he ever had imagined.

Of the trickery and knavery to be found there, however, Jack Lightfoot had yet to learn.

Hogan had turned and hastened toward the open door.

Nearly at the same moment a small, rakish-looking man about forty years old appeared at the door.

It was the man of whom they had been speaking—Tony Felner, the famous jockey.

CHAPTER VI.

JACK LIGHTFOOT'S SUSPICIONS.

It was the first time Jack Lightfoot ever had met a professional jockey, and he looked him over with interest.

Mr. Felner was a lithe, slender, little man, with a thin face, and eyes as sharp as those of a ferret.

He had just come from his lunch, and was clad in a brown, plaid suit with cap and gaiters to match, and he wore a blazing diamond in his shirt front.

A gleam of distrust flashed up in his eyes when he saw Jack in the stable, and he asked, quickly, with a keen, cutting voice:

"Who's this, Hogan?"

He was afraid that Jack might be some stranger, for at such times the stable men have to be very careful whom they admit, lest some job has been put up to secretly injure a horse in some way, and so prevent his winning a race.

Hogan quickly dispelled Mr. Felner's misgivings, however, by explaining that Jack was an intimate friend of Mr. Conner, and as anxious as anyone to see old Wellington win the race.

Then Hogan introduced the two, and Felner came and shook hands with Jack.

"I remember your face now," said he, smiling. "You're the lad who was in the box for the Cranford ball team this morning."

"That's right, sir," laughed Jack.

"You did good work, too," added Felner, approv-

ingly. "It's not often a chap of your weight can twirl a ball so cleverly."

This pleased Jack very much, for all he knew it to be a fact, and he now took quite a fancy for the New York jockey.

Before he could make any reply, however, two other men appeared at the stable door and stepped inside.

Jack did not fancy their looks, and felt suspicious the moment he laid eyes on them.

One was a big, flashily dressed man, clad with a suit loud enough to be heard a mile away.

His companion was a thin, crafty-looking chap, much younger, with eyes as piercing as needles.

Felner knew both of them, however, but addressed only the big man.

"How are you, Slattery?" said he, without much cordiality. "When did you come down?"

"On the noon train, Tony," was the reply. "I thought I'd run down and see if I could pick up my expenses. It has cost a good bit to send Bunco down here along with a groom and a jockey."

Jack pricked up his ears and surveyed the big man more attentively.

He now rightly guessed that Slattery was the owner of one of the horses entered for the big race, the one named Bunco.

He looked all over like a sporting man, and one willing enough to take any advantage he could get, whether by fair means or foul.

The more Jack Lightfoot looked at him the less he liked him.

And the same was true of Slattery's companion.

Felner nodded indifferently to the horseman's last remark, and said in reply:

"There's not much money in these county-fair races, Slattery, after all."

"Not unless one can pick up a bundle on outside bets," growled Slattery. "And there's always a chance to go lame at that, Felner, in case you get up against some unknown ringer. I hear that you're down to ride to-day."

Felner didn't seem inclined to talk much, and he only said, indifferently:

"Yes."

"Is this your mount?" asked Slattery, glancing sharply at old Wellington.

Jack Lightfoot had drawn to one side, and stood steadily watching the two strangers.

Neither of them paid any attention to him, and had no idea that he distrusted them.

Felner nodded carelessly, and then replied, tersely: "Yes, that's the horse I am to ride."

"Any good?" asked Slattery, with a searching stare at the shrewd little jockey.

Felner shook his head a bit dubiously.

"Can't say till I've ridden him in a race," he said, doubtfully. "He may bolt or balk when it comes to getting away with a bunch."

Jack was about to volunteer some information to the contrary, when he suddenly caught a warning wink from Jim Hogan, and then he began seeing the point of Felner's evasions.

The little jockey was keeping things dark, so to speak.

"He looks a bit strong," growled Slattery, still surveying the horse. "Has he got a record?"

"Not that I know of," said Felner.

"What do you think of him, Tony?"

"Only what I've said. Can't tell much till I've ridden him."

"You can tell what showing he has made with a mate. Do you think he's got any chance against such horses as Bunco and Starlight?"

Felner again shook his head.

"On the level, Slattery, I don't," said he.

For a moment Jack felt his heart sink toward his boots.

Felner's statement was just the opposite of that confidentially made by Jim Hogan.

Then Jack caught another wink from Hogan, and again he saw the point.

The jockey was merely blinding his inquisitive visitors.

Suddenly he cried, a bit sharply, to Slattery's companion:

"You keep away from the horse, Cassidy. You can look at him all you like, but don't lay a hand on him."

Cassidy's little eyes took on an ugly glitter.

"What d'ye mean by that, Felner?" he said, curtly.

"Just what I say, Cassidy," said Felner, coolly. "You may look but you mustn't touch."

"D'ye think I want to harm the homely old rake?" snarled Cassidy, resentfully.

"What I think doesn't matter," replied Felner, without a change of tone. "You do what I say and keep your hands off the horse. I've known a horse to get a skin injection that spoiled him for a race, only by some chap laying a hand on him on the sly. I don't say you'd do any crooked work like that, Cassidy, of course not. All I say is—keep away from the horse."

"You'd better not say I'd do anything like that," re-

plied Cassidy, with threatening voice. "I never did yet."

Felner knew this was a lie, and Cassidy's face showed it, but the little jockey said no more on the subject.

Cassidy then moved back and drew toward the stable door.

Slattery presently walked the same way, still looking at the horse.

Old Wellington stared back at them, too, and Jack thought that the eyes of the big bay also looked suspicious, as if some animal instinct warned him against the two visitors.

"You talk as we were a pair of crooks, Felner," growled Slattery, pausing at the door.

"Oh, not at all, sir," said Felner, quietly. "But you know the rules of a track stable, Slattery, as well as I do. You'd break the head of any stranger who ventured near your horse, Bunco, within an hour or two of a race."

"Well, I am no stranger to you," said Slattery, bluntly.

"That's true enough, sir, but I don't know Cassidy overwell. And what little I do know of him isn't of the best," added Felner, with a fearless frankness that made Jack Lightfoot quite admire the little jockey.

Cassidy appeared about to make some angry retort, but Slattery quickly checked him, laughing a bit grimly, and turned toward the door.

"Sorry to have intruded, Felner, since you're so off color," said he, carelessly. "I'll give you a tip, however. Play Bunco for a winner and Starlight for place. If you put your stuff any other way, Felner, you'll walk home."

"Well, the walking isn't so very bad, Slattery," said Felner, laughing oddly.

Then the two men withdrew and went sauntering toward one of the other stables.

Hogan glanced at Jack and grinned silently.

Felner followed the two men with his gaze for a moment, and then muttered, grimly:

"Crooks, both of them! As dirty crooks as ever queered a good horse or trod a race track."

"Bedad, they look it, Tony, the both of 'em."

"Go get your dinner, Jim," said Felner, curtly. "I'll hang around here till you come back."

Jack did not care to remain alone at the stable with the jockey, so he accompanied Hogan away, and went with him as far as the tent in which the track employees were given their meals.

"Did you know those two fellows, Jim?" he asked, on the way.

Hogan shook his fiery-red head.

"Divil a thing do I know av thim, Jack," said he. "Felner seemed to know 'em, though."

"And he evidently does not think well of them."

"Sure, lad, it had that look."

"What sort of a horse is Bunco, Jim?"

"Wull, I'm not able to say, Jack, from what I've seen av him," replied the groom. "But thim as know, or thinks they do, says he be the horse to put the stuff on."

"All except Felner, eh?" queried Jack, significantly.

Hogan gave him a quick glance.

"Mind ye, lad, that's atween us," said he. "Not a word av what I was after telling ye."

"Trust me, Jim," protested Jack. "I'll not breathe it."

"It might cost us the race, lad, if ye did."

"None would feel worse over that than I should," replied Lightfoot, as his companion halted at the dinner tent. "Do you go in here, Jim?"

"Yes. Here's where we ate."

"I suppose I may come down to the stable again by and by."

"The sooner the better, Jack, as fur as I'm concerned," said Hogan, warmly. "I think ye'll be after finding Mr. Conner there a bit later."

"I shall come down after I get my dinner, then," declared Jack. "I want to know all that's going on with old Wellington."

Jack Lightfoot little dreamed what he was destined to learn, however.

CHAPTER VII.

RACE-TRACK TRICKERY.

The noon hour is about the only period of rest for spectators at a big county fair. In fact, however, this can hardly be called a period of rest, for in the crush and jam the hustle for a square meal is perhaps the hardest work of the day.

Jack Lightfoot, after parting from Hogan, hastened up to the big pavilion to join the other boys.

He arrived there just at noon, and found them gathered at the special table reserved for them, where a bountiful meal was provided.

During the half hour thus agreeably spent, particularly by Lafe Lampton, Jack listened to the several stories of the fun they had been having since the ball game, and the numerous attractions they had viewed. But Jack's mind, despite their glowing narratives, persisted in going back to the track stables and in dwelling upon the two ill-favored men he had seen there.

The bad impression they had made on him would not down, and he kept saying to himself, despite his attempt to throw off his misgivings:

"There's something wrong. There's some crooked work going on. There is some scheme afoot to beat old Wellington."

These thoughts persisted in forcing themselves upon him, and affected him so deeply that he could scarcely eat his dinner.

No sooner was the meal ended than he arose and said:

"Where are you bound now, boys?"

He was anxious to get away alone.

He wanted to return to the stables, knowing that he should feel easier if he could see with his own eyes that everything was all right.

Most of his companions still were bent upon looking about the fair grounds, however, before going down to see the races, so Jack took advantage of this and told them that he would again visit the stables and would see them later.

"What the deuce is the matter with him?" asked Lafe Lampton, after Jack had slipped away alone. "I never knew him so still."

"He does appear kind of shut up," said Kirtland, to whom Lafe had spoken. "May be he isn't feeling well."

"Bosh!" growled Lafe. "Jack Lightfoot always feels well, the same as I do after a big dinner. More likely he has got something on his mind. He looks that way."

"Instead of something on his stomach," laughed Kirtland, as they came out of the pavilion. "Well, I guess Jack is able to take care of himself."

"Oh, there's no doubt of that," admitted Lafe.

Jack already had passed out of view and was hastening toward the race track, intending to cross the oval and return to the stable where old Wellington was quartered.

He now found his way impeded by a vast crowd that was gathered to witness the race.

Everybody seemed to be heading for the track, or for some vantage point from which it could be viewed.

The huge grand stand was black with people, looking like flies in a colossal trap.

It then was one o'clock, and the first race was soon to be started.

The horses entered for this race were already out warming up, and Jack felt his blood move faster when he saw them.

Crossing the oval he came out upon the track nearly in front of the grand stand, in which he caught sight of Kate Strawn and Nellie Conner, who had seats in one of the front rows; and Jack waved his hand to them.

They responded by waving their handkerchiefs, but Jack scarcely saw them, for at that moment an officer of the grounds ordered him off the track.

The first race was about to start, and the bell in the judges' stand was ringing loudly.

Jack decided that he would stop and see this first race, and then go down to the stable.

The brief delay would make but little difference, he felt sure; and he knew that the big race would not be called for a couple of hours at least.

Making his way to the right of the grand stand, he found himself in the open space beyond.

As it happened, it was in that part of the grounds where the bookmakers and sporting men were chiefly gathered, and bets were being freely placed on all sides.

Here and there posters were up showing the odds on the several horses, and the bookies were selling tickets at the odds quoted.

It was an animated scene, taken as a whole, and one that words could scarcely describe.

Suddenly a great yell went up on all sides, and there was a rush toward the track fence.

Before Jack fairly knew it, the race was begun.

He saw a cluster of horses rush by, then sweep around the quarter curve, and then they were lost to his view by the crowd.

Presently he heard them coming down the stretch, and there was a coal-black mare leaping to the front, with a jockey in blue madly whipping her.

And then the whole bunch was lost to view again, owing to the dense crowd in which Jack found himself; yet the furious yells on all sides, the rush of betting men toward the bookmakers, and the general stir and confusion told Jack that the race had been run.

He heard some one say that Midnight had won it, but he had no idea whose horse Midnight was.

This experience was so new to Jack that it rattled him a little at first.

He felt confused, almost dizzy, so great was the noise and stir and confusion.

Suddenly, however, he caught sight of a couple that cleared his mind in an instant.

They were the two men he had seen down at the stable that morning—Slattery and Cassidy.

Both looked very grim and dark, and Jack rightly guessed the reason.

"I'll bet they have lost a bundle of money on that black mare," he said to himself, gazing after them. "They look as if they would take any kind of a chance to get even."

They looked so decidedly anxious, in fact, that Jack resolved to watch and see where they went.

They headed for the stables after a few moments, and Jack followed them, scarce knowing why.

Something, for which he could not account, seemed to urge him on.

The two men were talking very earnestly, yet with their voices lowered, and this made Jack only the more suspicious.

Presently they arrived at one of the stables, that in which Slattery's horse was quartered, and both went in and closed the door.

This left Jack Lightfoot out in the cold.

A few moments later a jockey in red and yellow came out, and walked over to the track fence to look at the next race.

"That must be Slattery's jockey, the one who is to ride Bunco," thought Jack. "By gracious, it looks to me as if those two fellows had sent him out here, in order that they may talk in private.

"They were careful enough to speak low while coming down this way, and I'm blessed if I don't make an attempt to discover what they now are discussing."

The resolve no sooner was made than it was put into execution.

Taking care that he should not be observed, Jack stole around the stable, between it and the one adjoining, and approached it from the rear.

He found there was no window in the back wall, only one having a strong wooden shutter, and it was tightly closed.

Presently, however, Jack discovered something that he thought would serve him quite as well as a window, if not even better.

It was a knot hole in one of the cheap boards of which the building had been made, and was about two feet from the ground.

"Gee whiz! I'll take a chance of that," thought Jack, the moment his eyes fell upon it. "I'll see what I can discover through that knot hole. In case I am seen, I can leg it before they lay hands on me."

Jack knew that, in case it came down to a sprint, no living man on the whole fair grounds could catch him.

Dropping to his hands and knees he crept close to the stable wall, then carefully peered through the knot hole.

He could see the interior of the stable.

Bunco, a rawboned roan, was standing close by the wall, and Jack was gazing directly under him.

Slattery and his evil-eyed companion, Cassidy, were seated on two wooden boxes, talking earnestly.

Though their voices were somewhat lowered, Jack could easily hear what they said, there being only the single boards between them.

"I've got to break even somehow, Cassidy, and the surest way is to put our whole bundle on Bunco," Slattery was saying. "I'm not going up against any more chance bets. I want a sure thing, Cassidy, or nothing at all."

"You don't want it any more than I do," growled

Cassidy. "But how do you know Bunco is a sure thing?"

"He ought to be against this field."

"Ought to be and being so, Slattery, are different things," replied Cassidy. "Don't forget one fact. We are up against one of the trickiest jockeys that ever straddled a mount."

"Felner?"

"Sure!"

"You think he may have something up his sleeve?"

"That's what I do, Slattery."

"Why so?"

"Because he was so shy of us this morning," cried Cassidy, with emphasis. "If he had some old rake there, that had no show of winning, he would have been ready enough to have opened his mouth, or to have let me handle the horse."

"There is something in that, I admit," growled Slattery, grimly.

"Sure there is," nodded the other. "Felner took just the position this morning that he'd have taken if his horse was a bang-up good one."

"So you figure from that, Cassidy, that the horse is a good one, eh?"

"That's just the size of it."

"Possibly he is."

"And if he is, Slattery, he could not have a better man astride him in this race than this same Tony Felner," added Cassidy. "Felner is as quick, tricky and capable a jockey as ever stood in a paddock."

"I admit that, Cassidy."

"On the level," added the latter, "Felner and his mount are all I fear in this big race. If Tony Felner was out of it, and some less clever jockey in his saddle, I would say put our stuff on Bunco and we'll win hands down."

"Then you think Starlight is out of our class?"

"We can do Starlight in the stretch," declared Cassidy, confidently. "His wind won't last to the finish."

"But how about the others?"

"I have looked them all over, Slattery, and there's not one of them to be feared."

"You are sure of it?"

"Absolutely. It's just as I say, old man. If Tony

Felner was down and out, we should have a sure thing on this horse of yours."

"So you advise doing the job, do you?"

"I do," nodded Cassidy. "It's the only way to make this race a cinch."

"Do you think you can do it without being detected?"

Cassidy indulged in a mingled laugh and sneer.

"Do I think I can?" he replied, derisively. "I know I can, Slattery!"

"You do, eh?"

"That's what I do, William."

"It will hurt me, mind you, if the trick is discovered. It would cost me my reputation on all the race tracks."

"It will not be discovered, Slattery, take my word for it."

Slattery sat silent for several minutes, as if weighing some desperate project in his mind.

Presently he looked up, however, and said, bluntly:

"Go ahead and do it, Cassidy."

"That goes, does it?" demanded Cassidy, with an evil light beginning to show brighter in his narrow eyes.

"Yes, it goes. Do it, and the price we agreed upon is yours. I must win that race, or go broke in the attempt."

Cassidy had risen abruptly to his feet.

"This settles it, then, Slattery," said he, with grim earnestness. "You plunge on your own horse. Put every copper you've got on him. You plunge, Slattery—and leave the rest to me!"

Both men then started for the stable door, as if about to depart.

Jack Lightfoot crept quickly away from the rear wall, then darted back of the adjoining stable, around which he cautiously made his way, thus reaching the open place on which the row of stables fronted.

The two men were strolling toward the race track.

Jack followed them, bent upon knowing what they intended doing, and also bent upon preventing it.

He had not overheard quite all they had said in the stable, the voices of the men having been lowered at times, but enough reached his ears to convince him that some kind of a crooked job was about to be undertaken.

His first thought was to seek Mr. Conner, or Felner, and tell them about it.

Then he reasoned that they might think him mistaken, and perhaps would ridicule his fears. So he resolved to discover the whole business, if possible, before making any report of it.

CHAPTER VIII.

JACK TO THE RESCUE.

That he was losing some of the races, and most of the sport to which he had looked forward, did not matter to Jack.

The success of old Wellington was far more to him than all the races.

For more than an hour he followed Slattery and Cassidy around the betting grounds, yet not a suspicious move was made by either of them.

Jack began to wonder at this, and then to fear that he had sized up their talk incorrectly, for in less than an hour the big race was to be called.

About four o'clock, however, the two men separated, and Jack, in watching Slattery for a moment, lost sight of Cassidy in the crowd.

Slattery then was studying the odds against his own horse, and was beginning to place his money.

Jack felt in a fever of excitement.

Looking at the placards he discovered that there were nine entries for the big race, and that the odds were seven to one against old Wellington.

Bunco was down at five to one, and Starlight at six to one.

Jack scarce knew what to do, in not being able to locate Cassidy again.

For a quarter hour more he searched for him among the crowd, yet could find no trace of him.

Then Jack made a final resolve.

"I'll go back to the stables and tell Hogan what I overheard," he said to himself. "Maybe I shall find Mr. Conner there, also, and he'll believe what I tell him. One thing I am sure of—that that man, Cassidy, is up to some kind of dirty work. I wish I could have learned just what it is, but I'll report what I overheard, at all events."

With this determination, Jack again headed for the stables.

One of the last races then was in progress, but he did not delay to watch it.

His entire mind was upon old Wellington and the final race.

Among the dense crowd lining the track fence, however, was a man who had come out from the stables to see the race then being run.

This man was Tony Felner.

He stood in the midst of a crowd six deep along the outside fence of the track. Nearly behind him stood a man with a heavy, black beard, and with his cap drawn over his brow.

Just as the race ended, and the crowd began to break up and surge away from the fence, Felner felt something sharp prick his arm near the back of his shoulder.

It was a sort of a stinging sensation, for which he could not account, though he glanced sharply about to see if anybody had touched him intentionally.

He could detect nothing, however, and wondered what so curious a sensation meant.

The bearded man had slunk quickly away, slipping into his pocket a small hypodermic syringe, with a point as fine as a needle.

This bearded man was Slattery's friend, Cassidy, in disguise, and he had injected a powerful drug into the blood of Felner, the jockey.

Felner already was beginning to feel ill and unnatural.

Jack Lightfoot meantime had reached the stable—in fact, some minutes before the tricky episode described.

As he had expected, he now found Mr. Nathan Conner there, seated by the door, and Hogan was just giving old Wellington a finishing rub.

"Ah! Jack, I heard you had been down here," said Mr. Conner, when Jack appeared at the door. "Come in if you wish. I'm glad to hear that you won your ball game. I hope I may be as fortunate with my horse."

Jack stepped into the stable and stood before him.

"I hope you may, Mr. Conner," said he; "but I've got something to tell you, sir."

"To tell me, Jack?" said Mr. Conner, in surprise.

"Yes, sir. I think there is a job put up to do old Wellington."

"Phat's that!" cried Hogan, with a snort of alarm.

"What do you mean, Jack?"

"I heard two men talking of a scheme to prevent old Wellington from winning," explained Jack. "I could not get the details of it, sir, for they were not mentioned. But I know by the little I overheard that some crooked work is intended."

"You amaze me!" exclaimed Mr. Conner. "Do you know who the two men were?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jack. "They were the two men I saw here this morning, Slattery and Cassidy."

"Wow!" cried Hogan, beginning to dance with excitement. "Felner was right. They are a pair of dirty crooks."

"Slattery!" exclaimed Mr. Conner. "He is the owner of Bunco. I can't believe that he is up to any crooked game. James, you run out and see if you can find Mr. Felner. Bring him up here as quickly as possible."

"Yis, sor," cried Hogan, as he flew out through the door.

"This seems almost incredible, Jack," continued Mr. Conner, with increasing excitement. "I can hardly believe that Mr. Slattery is capable of any real knavery in order to insure a victory for his horse. Such a thing would be dastardly, outrageous!"

"I judge only from what I saw, sir, and the little I overheard," said Jack.

"Tell me just what the two men said, Jack, as nearly as you can."

Jack hastened to comply, repeating almost word for word what he had overheard.

The expression of anxiety on Mr. Conner's face deepened perceptibly, and he gravely shook his head.

"It looks bad, Jack, I'll admit," said he. "I must consult with Felner and decide what should be done."

"Here he comes now, sir," cried Jack, excitedly. "Just see, sir, how he looks. There is something wrong with him, that's plain enough."

Mr. Conner had started to his feet, uttering a cry of dismay.

Hogan had found Felner as the latter was approach-

ing the stable, and was now obliged to help the little jockey through the door.

Felner's legs were unsteady, his knees shaky, and he was tottering like a man drunk.

His eyes, too, had an unnatural dulness and he was very pale.

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Conner. "What has happened to you, Felner? You haven't been drinking, have you?"

Felner stared at him like one in a daze, yet quickly shook his head.

"No, not that, sir," he said, faintly. "I never took a drink in my life. But I've been done up in some way."

Then, before Hogan could support him, the little jockey sank helplessly upon a pile of loose hay near the wall, utterly unable to stand on his feet.

Mr. Conner needed no further evidence that something serious had happened, also that Jack Lightfoot's suspicions were entirely correct, and he at once took the situation in hand.

"Close the stable door, Hogan," he said, sharply. "No reports of this must get out at present. We will see what we can do for Felner, and try to bring him around before the race starts."

Hogan hastened to obey, quickly bolting the door, while Mr. Conner knelt upon the hay beside the jockey.

"How are you feeling now, Tony?" he asked, anxiously.

"Badly, sir," said Felner, faintly. "I can't guess what's the matter with me."

"Wull, sir, I can," cried Hogan, white with suppressed rage. "It's drugged, sir, he's been. That's what's the matter wid him. Look at his eyes. They're like glass, so they are."

"I fear he is right, sir," said Felner, scarce above a whisper. "Some one certainly has done me up for this race."

"It was Cassidy, then," declared Jack. "This is the very job he meant."

"I felt a stinging sensation on my right shoulder while I stood out near the fence," added Felner, huskily. "See if anything is wrong there."

Assisted by Jack, Hogan opened the jockey's clothes and examined his shoulder.

Just below it on the back of his right arm was a tiny red spot, from which a single drop of blood had oozed, staining his undershirt.

"There 'tis!" cried Jack. "Hogan was right, and so am I. That miscreant, Cassidy, has injected a drug of some kind into Felner, and he will not be fit to ride in the race."

"I reckon that's right, sir," muttered Felner. "God help him, sir, when I get back on my pins! He has done me up this time, no mistake, for 'tis dead open and shut that I can't ride. I—I couldn't stick on a horse."

The face of the poor little jockey vouched for his words.

He was very pale, and before the last was uttered he flopped over on the hay and went off into a deep sleep.

Mr. Conner sprang to his feet, pale with indignation and disappointment.

"I'll expose these rascals at once," said he. "Their knavery shall be known all over the track. Slattery's horse shall be barred from this race. He has deprived me of my jockey and——"

"And I will provide you with another, Mr. Conner," said Jack Lightfoot, stepping quickly between the angry dairyman and the closed door.

As a matter of fact, Jack now saw before him the opportunity of his life.

His face was flushed, his eyes glowing, and the spirit of his quickened determination was reflected in his strong, boyish face.

Mr. Conner stopped short and stared at him.

"Provide me with another!" he exclaimed. "Whom do you mean?"

"Myself, sir," said Jack, eagerly.

"Yourself?"

"Yes, sir. You let me ride old Wellington to-day, since Felner is knocked out. I'll ride him for you, sir, and I'll do even more—I'll bring him under the wire a good, clean winner."

"Wow! hurroy! that's the stuff, Mr. Conner!" cried Hogan, dancing about like an excited Indian. "Lave him ride, sir. It'll not be the first time, and look you, sir! the horse himself seems to see what the trouble is and wants Jack Lightfoot to ride him."

In fact, old Wellington was gazing gravely at the group, and now he neighed softly as if to confirm Hogan's impulsive words.

Mr. Conner hesitated for a moment, but the look on Jack Lightfoot's face won the day.

The dairyman snatched out his watch and glanced at it.

"The race is due to start in twenty minutes, Jack," he cried. "Do you feel sure you can ride it?"

"Perfectly," cried Jack, eagerly. "Nothing would suit me better. Besides, sir, it will be all in our favor, the fact that Slattery thinks old Wellington is as good as out of the race. I'll beat that horse, Bunco, or I'll break my own neck in the attempt."

"Don't say that, Jack," protested Mr. Conner, shaking his head. "I'd rather withdraw my horse from the race than have any ill befall you."

"Don't you fear for me," pleaded Jack. "I'll stick to him like a leech. See, sir, here is Felner's jockey suit on the bench. It will just about fit me, if a bit small. Say but the word, Mr. Conner, and I'll get into it at once. Let me ride old Wellington, sir! I'll make him win! I feel it here—I'll make him win, sir, in spite of the extra weight," cried Jack, beating his breast in his earnestness.

Mr. Conner demurred no longer.

Clapping Jack on the shoulder he cried, warmly:

"If you accomplish this, Jack Lightfoot, you shall have your reward. Into the suit with you, my boy! The race starts in a quarter hour. You shall ride old Wellington, and God help you to bring him in a winner!"

In another moment Jack Lightfoot was coming out of his clothes as if for dear life, and Hogan was clapping the saddle upon old Wellington's back.

CHAPTER IX.

JACK IN THE SADDLE.

In less than ten minutes Jack had made the change of garments and stood clad in the jockey's suit.

It fitted him—shirt, cap and all—fairly well, and Mr. Conner cried approvingly, in no little excitement:

"If you ride as well as you look, Jack, you'll surely bring us victory."

"Lave him alone fur that, sor," cried Hogan, tightening old Wellington's saddle girth. "He'll ride all right, so he will. Bedad, and old Wellington won't fail him."

"That he won't, Hogan," declared Jack, as he slipped his hand through the wrist strap of his whip. "I believe he knows what sort of a job has been put up, and is already resolved to beat the entire field."

Though much excited within, Jack outwardly appeared as cool as a melon.

He knew that he had undertaken quite a job, yet he felt thoroughly equal to it, and resolved that none should detect any signs of excitement.

"I'll keep cool every instant," he repeated to himself. "Let come what may, I'll keep cool."

He knew by experience what steadiness meant at such a time, and the advantage it gave one.

The first bell for the big, final race had rung, and several of the horses were already on the track warming up.

"Lave him go once round, Jack, just to limber him a bit," whispered Hogan, as Jack prepared to mount. "And don't force him too hard at the first."

"I know, Jim," nodded Jack. "I've been here before. Now, Jim, give me a hand."

"Ay, lad, and good luck to ye!"

Jack placed one foot in Hogan's palm, then vaulted into the saddle.

"Is she all right?"

"Every way, Jim. It couldn't be better."

"Kape your head, thin, that's all."

"Trust me for that, Jim."

Mr. Conner had thrown open the door, and now reached up to shake Jack by the hand as he rode out.

There was a suspicious moisture in the dairyman's eyes, but those of Jack Lightfoot were as clear and keen as diamonds.

"Be careful, Jack."

"I will, sir—and determined!"

He spoke firmly, gathering in the reins, and in another moment was cantering toward the broad gateway giving the racers admission to the track.

Felner, the jockey, remained in a deep sleep on the pile of hay.

But for Jack Lightfoot the knavery of that day would have been successful in the start.

In the betting ring Slattery was placing his last bundle of bank notes on his own horse, and Bunco had become the favorite.

Cassidy was nowhere to be seen.

He had slunk away and left the fair grounds, fearful that the knavery of which he was guilty might be suspected.

Suddenly a great yell went up from the crowd that Wellington was on the track.

Slattery uttered a half-smothered growl of dismay, then hastened to the fence to see for himself, just as Jack rode by.

"Now, who the deuce is that jockey?" he snarled in his throat. "It isn't Felner. Plainly enough, Cassidy did his part of the job all right, but where did they dig up that chap? He's a dead ringer to me."

Slattery did not feel quite so sure of himself as before, yet he still believed that, with Felner down and out, no other jockey could bring Wellington to the front.

So Slattery let his big bundle of money stand on his own horse.

At such a time, in such a crowd, amid the tremendous excitement that attends a great running race, the details of the scene can only be hinted at.

The vast grand stand was black with people, and the track fence lined six deep for a hundred yards each way.

The eyes of five thousand people were riveted upon the half score of horses then warming up on the track.

In less than five minutes the race was to be run, and the suspense seemed almost intolerable.

As Jack rode by the grand stand, letting his mount go at an easy canter, Nellie Conner caught sight of him and cried excitedly to her companion:

"Look, look, Kate! There's old Wellington! But who is that on his back?"

She did not recognize Jack in his natty jockey suit.

"Why, it's Jack Lightfoot," cried Kate Strawn, after a moment. "Something has happened to the other jockey."

At the same moment the Cranford boys, who were

in one corner of the grand stand, also observed him, and likewise suspected what had happened.

Instantly a yell went up from the whole nine, a yell that could have been heard a mile away, and with it was mingled Jack's name.

"Lightfoot! Lightfoot! Hurrah for Jack Lightfoot!"

These shouts were caught up by the crowd, also, and for a moment it seemed as if a lunatic asylum had been turned loose.

Slattery heard the name and the noise, and he began to feel a bit shaky.

Jack Lightfoot did not pay the slightest attention to any of the tumult, however, but rode on around the quarter curve without turning his head.

His entire mind was on the work before him.

He was, as he had said, determined to beat Slattery's horse, or break his own neck in the attempt.

The sun had passed behind a cloud, and a shadow had swept over the track, softening the recent glare.

It was a perfect time for such a race, and the track was lightning swift.

The bell at the judges' stand was ringing again, calling the jockeys to line up for the start.

Jack had been notified of his position as he passed the stand, and learned that it was on the extreme outside of the line.

As he rode into the stretch after a swift dash from the half, he caught sight of Slattery's roan, with a jockey on his back.

"That's the same chap I saw come out of the stable," he said to himself, grimly. "I've got no grudge against you, young fellow, but I'm bound to do the horse you're on."

Jack's excitement now had entirely passed off, and his nerves felt as stiff as steel.

Without fairly knowing it, he was wrought up to that strained tension when men do the best that is in them.

The bunch of horses in front of him, as he came down the stretch at an easy canter, were just swinging into line for the start.

Jack drew off toward his position near the outer fence.

He knew that the crucial moment was at hand, and he bent and caressed old Wellington's neck, saying softly:

"Now, old boy, do your prettiest! We can beat them all, if you will—and I know you will! Good old Wellington!"

The big bay whinnied and shook his head vigorously, quite as if he understood perfectly well what was wanted of him.

Jack felt equally sure that he did.

At that moment, nearly the last before the great race, a silence that was strangely ominous, a hush like that of a death chamber, fell upon the entire crowd.

This lasted only a few seconds, yet they seemed like as many hours.

Then, just as Jack reached his position in the starting line, there came the crack of a pistol from the judges' stand.

It was followed by a sound like the thunder of a thousand cannons.

"They're off! They're off!"

It swelled louder and louder, mingled with shrieks and screams of excitement that could not be restrained.

"Sit down! Down in front!" yelled hundreds in the grand stand.

"Bunco! Bunco leads! The favorite's ahead!"

The last was the wild, irrepressible cries of many who thought they knew the relative value of the racers, or had their money on the favorite.

The start was a good one, and the race was on.

At first the line of horses had stretched from fence to fence, but at the moment of the start they bunched quickly, closing like a fan, and swept by the grand stand in seeming confusion.

Then Bunco leaped to the front, with Starlight, a lank sorrel mare under a jockey in green, close upon his flank.

Hard behind came several of the others, while in the plunging ruck nearly at the rear, with his head lowered and his eyes gleaming, trailed old Wellington, with Jack Lightfoot crouching low on his back.

The Cranford boys felt their hearts sink when they saw his position, but Jack knew what he was doing

from the very start, and what reserve power Wellington had for a lightning finish.

Yet a groan broke from his friends when they saw him behind the bunch of plunging racers.

"He'll lose! He'll lose, sure!" moaned Tom Lightfoot, wringing his hands.

"Old Wellington's behind!"

"Jack's out of it—out of it from the start!"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! we're going to lose!" cried Nellie Conner, almost in tears despite her excitement.

These were some of the cries that might have been heard at that moment, almost before the race was fairly under way.

Then there came one of those sights that can be witnessed only on a race track.

Jack Lightfoot had spoken only a single word to old Wellington.

The big bay responded in an instant.

He came like a cannon ball through the ruck just ahead of him, while a look of confidence and triumph showed quickly on Jack's white, set face.

In another moment the gap of daylight between him and Starlight was turned to darkness, and close upon the flank of Bunco, the powerful roan, old Wellington swept like a whirlwind suddenly let loose.

Amid yells and cheers that fairly shook the heavens, thus they tore past the long grand stand, with Bunco and Wellington nearly neck and neck, and both of them, along with Starlight, battling fiercely for the pole.

A noise like that of Niagara was left behind them.

The cries that rent the air could not be imagined.

"Bunco is behind!"

"The favorite is passed!"

"Wellington is winning!"

"The big bay leads the field!"

"Hurrah for Lightfoot! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

So the wild cries arose amid the tumult of shouts and cheers on every side.

Jack Lightfoot heard none of it, however.

His entire attention was directed upon the jockeys and horses around him.

As the leaders swung into the quarter curve, Jack

drew his horse down a trifle and let Bunco retain his lead.

This seemed for a moment to annoy old Wellington, who still fought hard for the front.

"Steady! Steady, old boy!" muttered Jack, nearly down to the horse's neck. "There'll be time enough for that!"

Old Wellington let up a little, quite as if he knew that he was being reserved for the finish.

Bunco drew a length ahead.

Then Starlight closed up and tried to pass the bay.

Jack prevented this, however, and forced the sorrel off from the pole.

Yet not for a moment did his glowing, determined eyes leave the horse just in advance of him, and the figure of the little jockey on the animal's back.

Old Wellington was pounding the track like a machine of cast iron, and Jack felt dead sure of him.

So they tore around the curve of the great race track and approached the half.

Thousands of eyes followed their every move, their every change of position.

Not for an instant did the frightful noise and the wild cries of the frenzied spectators cease.

"Bunco has a clean lead!"

"Wellington's second! He's sure for place!"

"Starlight is gaining! Starlight is gaining!"

"Crowd him, Jack! Crowd him!" shrieked the Cranford boys, quite as if their advice could have been heard.

One might as well have whispered in the din of a boiler factory.

So they reached and passed the half, in the positions mentioned, and with the ruck trailing close behind.

Near the track fence Mr. Conner and Jim Hogan stood watching the race, and both were in a fever of excitement.

The dairyman was very pale, but Hogan's face was as red as his fiery hair.

"Bedad, he's ridin' like a professional," he cried, at his employer's elbow. "Sure, Felner's himself couldn't have done better, so he couldn't."

"He is doing splendidly, Jim," nodded Mr. Conner.

"Indade, he is, sor! Look now, how's he's houlding him back."

"So he is! so he is! That's right, too."

"Sure it's right! Ain't it jest phat I told him, sor?"

"Yes, James."

"You lave Jack alone," cried Hogan, who could not have kept still for his life. "You wait till they're after coming into the stretch, and thin you'll see the stuff that's in the horse, and in the laddie buck, too."

"God grant it, James!" said Mr. Conner, fervently.

"Sure, you wait and see!"

And all the while the deafening noise on every side continued.

In another moment the string of horses had passed the half and were making for the upper turn of the big track.

Bunco still had a clean lead, with a length of daylight between him and old Wellington.

Close on the latter's flank came Starlight, with the jockey plying the whip with all his might.

Yet Jack Lightfoot held the sorrel a little to the rear and off the pole.

So they covered another furlong.

In the one before the stretch was reached, however, there came a closing up of the entire field.

Bunco swerved a little, and Wellington leaped even with his flank.

Starlight and the ruck behind took the advantage also, and they came around the curve in a plunging bunch.

In another moment the entire field had swung into the home stretch.

Then Jack Lightfoot made ready to do the work of the day.

He let loose a wrap of the reins about his hands, and settled himself lower in his saddle.

His eyes were upon the rival jockey, and upon the powerful roan just ahead.

Despite the killing pace, Bunco was still strong, and moving like a machine.

Jack eased a little on the reins, and gave his mount his head for a moment only.

He wished to see how the horse was going to respond.

Old Wellington shook his head for an instant, then thrust it forward and broke ground like a demon.

"Steady! steady!" cried Jack, softly. "Not yet—not quite yet!"

Then the wild uproar from the crowded grand stand fell upon his ears.

He heard it as one hears in a dream.

Not for an instant, however, did he turn his head or lose his strained interest in the work engaging him.

In another moment the whole field was in the stretch, and straight away for the last desperate fight to the finish line, just a furlong off.

Bunco again had gained a little, and was leading the bunch by a yard.

The face of the jockey on his back wore a smile of confident triumph.

Now Jack Lightfoot loosened the last wrap of the reins from around his wrists.

Then he bowed until he lay nearly on the horse's neck, and cried softly:

"Don't fail me, old boy! Don't fail me, old Wellington, when I give you the word!"

A thunder of cheers now was ringing on all sides of the desperate riders. It seemed as if they were plunging through the very heart of the dense crowd.

In another ten seconds the race would be run, and thousands were already screaming:

"Bunco wins! Bunco wins!"

At that moment, however, Jack Lightfoot rose just the least bit in his saddle.

His glowing eyes seemed to have grasped just the exact moment for the final spurt.

With one glance at the plunging steeds near by, he gave his horse a free rein.

"Go!" shouted Lightfoot, suddenly, and like a bullet from a pistol good old Wellington shot ahead of the whole bunch.

First at Bunco's flank—then his neck—then his head!

And then, tearing like mad by the pall of faces that

lined the way, old Wellington forged to the front and swept under the wire a good, clean winner.

Precisely as Jack Lightfoot had promised.

It is beyond the power of language to describe the scenes that followed.

The thunder of cheers and applause was deafening.

In an instant the vast crowd was surging upon the track, like madmen suddenly let loose.

Before Jack fairly knew it, he was seized from old Wellington's back and carried on the shoulders of excited men in the direction of his stable.

There Mr. Conner received him with both hands extended, and with tears dimming his eyes.

Yet he said only:

"No words of mine can tell how proud I am of you, Jack. Believe me, your reward shall come in due season."

"I already have my reward, sir!" cried Jack, warmly. "I have won the big race and prevented the wrong that another would have done you."

Mr. Conner was as good as his word, however, and rewarded Jack liberally for his great work.

Felner, the jockey, came out of his daze all right, and was none the worse for his drugging.

Slattery, of course, denied any part in the job, but none believed him, and he lost most of his prestige on the race tracks from that day.

He lost his money on the race won by Jack Lightfoot, also, and in that he likewise got what he deserved.

It was many a day before the Cranford people ceased talking about the great race, or stopped praising Jack; but to his credit it may be added that he bore his honors modestly.

THE END.

Next week will give us another rattling baseball story, where our Cranford boys battle with their old adversaries from Highland; and in "Jack Lightfoot's Dilemma; or, A Traitor on the Diamond," you will find as thrilling situations as anyone could wish. All lovers of baseball stories should surely get next week's issue.

A CHAT WITH YOU

Under this general head we purpose each week to sit around the camp fire, and have a heart-to-heart talk with those of our young readers who care to gather there, answering such letters as may reach us asking for information with regard to various healthy sports, both indoor and out. We should also be glad to hear what you think of the leading characters in your favorite publication. Besides answering the various letters and giving advice on athletics, we are publishing from week to week a short essay upon some timely topic, such as "How to pitch a drop ball," and other things that most boys desire to know, told in a manner that may be easily understood. It is the editor's desire to make this department one that will be eagerly read from week to week by every admirer of the Jack Lightfoot stories, and prove to be of valuable assistance in building up manly, healthy Sons of America. All letters received will be answered immediately, but may not appear in print under five weeks, owing to the fact that the publication must go to press far in advance of the date of issue. Those who favor us with correspondence will please bear this in mind, and exercise a little patience.

PLAYING SHORTSTOP.

This position has very properly been called the "key-stone" of the infield, and is perhaps the most difficult of all to properly fill. Taken as a whole, there are more plays centering around shortstop than anywhere else, and a most active player is needed to fill the position. It is necessary that he be a quick and accurate thrower, speedy at picking up and handling ground balls, able to gauge the whistling ball as it comes at him with "whiskers" on it; be keen of wit so that he may seldom get rattled, no matter what is taking place around him; know just how to block off runners from second, and be a speedy runner, for frequently he is expected to dash out in short center and capture a "pop" fly that might be good for a base with a slow fielder. These and many more characteristics mark the really good shortstop, so that it is readily seen that he has no easy position to fill if he would win the praise of the populace.

The man who can stop a fast grounder, and shoot the ball to first accurately without taking the time to straighten up is all right, and such work always brings down the house. Whoever covers this position should be able to make good use of either hand in stopping fierce hits; and following this with snappy throwing makes a gilt-edged player. In playing for a double he must scoop up the ball, and send it to second with the same motion, since it has to be then dashed to first in order to head off the batter.

Constant practice is the best help a shortstop can have. Besides all this, he should be well up in the signals passing between the pitcher and catcher, since it means much to him whether a curve or a straight ball is to be delivered; for if hit by the batter it is likely that the latter will probably be sent straight to short or third base; while, on the other hand, a certain curve struck by a right-hand batter will be apt to dance around to the right of the second cushion. Thus, it is sensible for the man at short to study the various effects of batting on the part of all styles of hitters on the various kinds of curves and drops, and govern himself accordingly.

A fast grounder, if successfully stopped, allows him an opportunity to steady himself before making the throw to first, which is always a good thing. With a slow grounder, he must speed the ball across like greased lightning; and yet it is wise to always allow for a second to get a line on the man at first—better that the ball reach there just a fraction behind the runner, than by reason of too much haste it skim over the head of first baseman and allow the runner to reach second or third by the error.

The pitcher, second baseman and shortstop should have a certain code of signals, so that they may work together without friction. And it is also necessary that some understanding should be had with the catcher, who, most likely, when trying to catch a man running to second, will shoot the ball squarely over the bag, relying on shortstop getting there in time to snatch it and touch his man. As a last word we can only say, get the ball quickly, and then send it to where it is needed with lightning speed and accuracy.

I have read all the numbers of the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY from number one to number eleven, which is the latest number in print this date. I think it is about the best weekly printed. It tells of what every American boy likes to read about, the manly, American sports. Now, old Lafe Lampton is the "real stuff," when he has an apple to munch upon. He made "Old Wagon Tongue" spot the ball just right in that game with Mildale. Lafe, we love you for that. Good old, steady Tom Lightfoot, the bookworm is something like me, for I dearly love to read. But I like athletics as well as to read about them. "Nat" Kimball is O. K., but he had better study up on jiu-jitsu before he tackles Bob Brewster again.

Hurrah for Polly! She knows when to yell for Cranford and Jack Lightfoot. "Jube, by gravy!" you mustn't run with that "gang!" And now, Jack Lightfoot, last but not least, is the very boy we like to read about, because he has his faults, the same as any other boy.

I hope to have a visit each week from Jack and his friends for many weeks. I want to thank Mr. Stevens for putting such a good weekly before us for such a small sum. Just think—thirty-two pages for five cents! I would be glad to hear from any reader of this weekly. I will now close, hoping to see this in print so that others will follow my example and help build up an interesting column of chat. Wishing success to Mr. Stevens and the publishers,

J. L. BYRUM.

Sherman Heights, Tenn.

Your letter has the right ring to it, and there can be no doubt that you are a close observer of all that takes place in the weekly issue of our ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY. We hope to continue to merit your good opinion, and that you will do all in your power to assist us by spreading the gospel among your young friends, so that they, too, may enjoy the regular visits of Jack Lightfoot and his comrades true.

I want to let you know just what I think of ALL-SPORTS; and after all, my opinion can be put in one word—*bully!* That's what it is, the best printed. I'm so much taken up with sports myself that it tickles me to think of having a paper devoted to such things entirely. I hope you never make any change about this, because the paper would soon stop being interesting to me if the stories were just of the ordinary kind. I find much to copy after in Jack and Tom Lightfoot, and I give you my word for it, the reading of these interesting stories has done me worlds of good. A boy is apt to try and model his life after somebody or other, and it's well that he picks out the right kind of a pattern. I was a good deal like Jack in feeling that I couldn't accomplish things; but I tried his plan of putting my teeth together and saying that I *would* do it, and you'd be astonished to know how many times I won out. I owe you and Mr. Stevens much for putting me on the right track, and I'm going to read ALL-SPORTS even after I grow up, if it is printed then.

DONALD G. McCUNE.

New York City.

You echo our own sentiments in saying that boys have a natural love for all healthy and vigorous sports. They certainly have a prominent model to go by now, with President Roosevelt taking occasional plunges into the wilderness in search of big game. The athletic man undoubtedly has a greater chance of success than all others of weaker physique, since he starts in with a good foundation. Taken in moderation, most sports are an excellent means of improving the health, besides affording an outlet for that enthusiasm which boils up within the average lad.

I'm fond of reading, and yet it seemed to me I couldn't just get suited. For several weeks I'd try one publication, and losing interest in the characters look around for another. So it went on until a fellow loaned me several numbers of your grand little weekly. Well, somehow, I took so much real interest in Jack Lightfoot and his friends that I began to send for the back numbers. I've got the file complete up to date, and have read every copy at least three times. So, you see, this must have been just what I've been looking for all this time. I can't find words to tell you what a treat it seems to get home with the latest issue, and after supper, settle down in my den for a most enjoyable evening. Nothing under the sun can drag me out the night that ALL-SPORTS comes. And if it is delayed, I tell you I seem to be all broken up. Perhaps some people might say it's wrong to let a thing that you know isn't genuine affect you that way, but to me it seems very real. Jack Lightfoot and Tom and Lafe, together with the rest, are fellows I seem to know. I can shut my eyes and see the inside of their gym. over the old carriage shop, or, it may be, Jack and Tom in the workshop back of the Lightfoot cottage. Jack's troubles and victories put the right kind of spirit into a boy, and I say a fellow is always better for having read such splendid stories. No one can go far wrong if he tries to pattern after either of the Lightfoot cousins. I guess everyone likes good old Lafe, too—he's the whole thing when it comes to fun. I hope you'll excuse me for writing such a long letter, but I just couldn't help letting you know my sentiments. And

you'd be surprised, perhaps, to learn that my sister reads ALL-SPORTS as regularly as I do—after I'm through, of course. I never found a line in it that a girl couldn't read.

RALPH CONOVER.

Atlanta, Ga.

And you never will find anything objectionable, Ralph, in the columns of ALL-SPORTS. We are pleased to know that some of the boys' sisters feel an interest in the weekly. You see, we have given your letter in full because we like to believe it reflects the sentiments of most manly young fellows who have fallen into the habit of taking ALL SPORTS. You have paid us the greatest of compliments, and we thank you most heartily.

I served as umpire at several games of ball, and I have reason to think I haven't been fairly treated. They admit that I know the game from one end to the other, and that I have a quick eye, and my honesty has never been in doubt, but at the same time the players whose side get the worst of some decision kick like steers, and even question my word. Just how far can the captain of a team go in disputing the umpire's decision? Please set me straight on that, for the way I feel now I don't care if I never umpire another game in my life.

JOHN D.

Paterson, N. J.

Really, John, we sympathize with you. It's the most thankless task on the face of the earth. The captain alone has the right to argue the point with you, to a limited extent, and if unable to show you that you erred by bringing forward the players concerned and submitting their testimony, he should waive the point. Above all things, the umpire must be sure he is right and then show himself as firm as adamant.

I am 15 years old and weigh 122 pounds. My height is 5 feet 5 inches. Measurements: Around the chest, 33 inches; hips, 34 inches; thighs, 20 inches, and around the calf of the leg, 14½ inches. Friends tell me I am not built right. Tell me where I am at fault, and how I may remedy the trouble. I have never missed a number of your fine, bracing weekly from the start, and would walk five miles to get the latest copy, if necessary.

Big Rapids, Mich.

HARRY L. CARSON.

Judging from your measurements, Harry, you fall far short of possessing the physique necessary to an athlete. In the first place, you are somewhat heavy for your height, you lack at least two inches of having a good chest circumference; your hips are satisfactory, but you seem unusually heavy around the lower part of your legs. Suppose you start in to develop the chest, and by long walks, together with bicycle exercise, baseball and vigorous foot work in every possible way, endeavor to reduce the size of your lower limbs. We fear you are fat rather than muscular. It is better to get the various portions of the body into the accepted proportions. After you have been working along these lines for a couple of months, suppose you write us again and let us know what improvement, if any, there has been.

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